

Other Others

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What is at stake in preserving literature? Defending the category of “the literary”—or any other aesthetic activity? Keeping it distinct from other activities in the culture? Is literary authorship, on which it depends, an exceptional form of subject enunciation, or merely an exemplary case of the speaking subject in general, especially given practices of collective, appropriated, distributed, non-human, banal, conventional, and unoriginal composition? Aesthetic activity and authorial identity have been constructed as oppositional “othering”. Literary language is often conceived as “other” than ordinary language, usually for some explicit or implicit value-laden purpose, and the authorial subject, like all subjects in language, has been understood as constituted by binaristic opposition to an “other” in an enunciative system.

Can these practices and identity formations be thought without oppositional otherness? Is there an alternative to the “othering” of language and the othering it enacts as enunciation? Can we posit specificity without alterity? And might there be an eco-poetical benefit to this reformulation? By eco-poetical, I should say I mean an ecology of poeisis, making, as a system—not a poetics of ecological themes or topics. Might a political benefit be gained in the process of proposing a concept of *amongness* to replace—or at least extend—that of *otherness*?

To answer these questions, I will draw on anecdotes, descriptions, and transformations wrought in language practices by networks, by technological devices, and by postulations suggested speculative realism, new materialism, animal studies, and various critical formulations.

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Part one: How is the distinction between aesthetic and other cultural activity maintained? A full century has passed since Marcel Duchamp systematically exposed the frameworks—the “consensualities”—and the embedded assumptions on which aesthetic identity was constructed. Duchamp’s gestures were very much about cultural-cognitive-performative frames, in the sense meant by (later) Erving Goffman. Duchamp pointedly identified the crucial moves by which a work of art is set apart from the world of ordinary

things: pointing, naming, framing, signing, placing, and declaring the identity of an object as art.

This is ancient history. We grew up working on/in the assumptions of modernism's experiments: Duchamp's conceptualism, Shlovsky's formalism, Malevich's non-representationalism, Dada's chance procedures and collage appropriations and so on. We can track these sensibilities through John Cage, Antonin Artaud, Living Theater, Happenings, the Fluxus movement, Pina Bausch, Michael Snow's films, Rauschenberg's white and then black canvases, and his erased DeKooning, and Yves Klein's exhibition of the Void, to cite a few landmark examples. Countless contemporary instances also could be mustered in illustration of the powerful hold of conceptual and formal innovation on the broad spectrum of work across the arts, and claims for its political as well as aesthetic efficacy. We long ago recognized the dependence of cultural activities on institutions and social practices. Still, we—artists, writers, performers—persist in the innovative traditions that challenge, over and over again, these same boundary conditions even as we produce work we believe has a purpose not fulfilled anywhere else in the culture.

But is this now an exhausted tradition? We know the “innovative” aesthetic is already so completely (long ago) commodified, celebrityized, and academicized that in significant ways it has lost its capacity to perform any meaningful cultural work or provide anything but entertainment experience? Are the extremes of experimentalism only another kind of evidence of the inadequacy of literature in the face of current challenges?

In the current literary world, battles are fought over many issues, some of them, to my mind, trivial: posing the “affective” against the “intellectual,” or the poetics of sensibility and feeling against the poetics of the mind and ideas. These are bad binaries, in my opinion, distractions from the crucial questions: *How does poetics work and what is the work that it does?* In our time, poetic language has been taken to an extreme, the trace of authorship reduced to an act of intentionality in the appropriative work of the conceptual laboratory. This is an extension of the long trajectory of experiments in modernism: formal innovation, radical intervention in language as a “political” act within and against the symbolic, and the commitment to constant investigation of the identity of aesthetic work as a distinct category. The century old attempt to achieve “sublation” of art into life, as Walter Benjamin argued, may have almost succeeded in erasing the distinguishing

boundary of art/non-art. But not quite. Because of that “not quite,” a great deal remains to be discussed, argued, defended, examined, and rethought.

I give you three related anecdotes.

1) I recently taught my Information Studies doctoral seminar on Forgery the case of of T.J. Wise and the bibliographical detective work of John Carter and Graham Pollard by which it was exposed. Some of you will know the references, but many will not, as I expected with my students as well. Wise, a bibliophile, collector, and dealer, found it expedient to increase the volume of “first editions” on the market at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, when there was a spike in interest in book collecting of this sort. He created pamphlets that were spurious “firsts” by taking poems or early works by celebrated authors, having them produced by a discrete printer on aged paper with (almost) appropriate fonts and decorative motifs. The “almost” is of course the signal that he tripped up, and that anachronisms of various kinds were detected by the avid bibliographical team of Carter and Pollard and published in their 1934 *An Enquiry into the Nature of Certain 19th Century Pamphlets*. Asking my students what was at stake in this situation—why it mattered so much that Carter and Pollard had exposed Wise, and what, precisely it was they had exposed, I was met with blank stares. The value of bibliography? Their own cleverness? The cult of genius? Finally, it became clear that the writers and poets that Wise had forged, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot, Algernon Swinburne, Alfred Lord Tennyson—were completely unfamiliar to these students. They had not heard of *Sonnets from the Portuguese* or *Mill on the Floss*. Fair enough, fashions in middle school and high school curricula have shifted from these works to others considered more relevant to the experience of their generation. But the shocker came when it became clear that the fact that Carter and Pollard were concerned about *the integrity of the textual record* and *the authenticity of the literary canon* also counted for nothing. Why? Because literature, the category itself, was, in their minds, obsolete, eclipsed, and irrelevant to their lives. The notion of “literary” work was inconsequential, a big “So what?”

2) The second anecdote: A recent talk by a visiting literary critic, details not essential, in which the speaker’s remarks on a group of contemporary works were focused entirely their themes and topics. Using undefined and general categories to group novelistic prose and epiphanyic verse observations of contemporary life, the critic never attended to their literary-ness. Taking up their depicted events and narrator identities, the critic merely

read these as motifs. The very foundation on within which these texts were to be considered “literary” went unexamined. The history of critical theory, let alone avant-garde, experimental, alternative, sub-culture, counter-culture, independent aesthetic activity, might just as well not have existed in all its multi-faceted struggle to define and exemplify literary work as a specific category of *work* and *works*.

Conclusions? In the broader culture (my social sciences oriented students) the concept of “the literary” doesn’t even register. Within the academic precincts responsible for preservation and stewardship of literature, the tradition of self-conscious work that is premised on the crucial question of what literature is and *how* it is and has been for a century—simply didn’t appear. In both cases, the “literary”—let alone poetics, making--was equally debased and devalued.

By contrast, in my critical apprehension, every work of art—no matter how good, bad, original, intellectual, ordinary, or affective—is an argument for about what *is* and *isn’t* a work of art and, more specifically, a proposition for a particular kind of work doing a certain cultural/aesthetic work through its embodied formulation, its *made-ness*. Even the most banal work embodies an argument, no matter how unexamined and inexplicit its own self-consciousness about that, it embodies a choice of form, genre, format, identity and expression.

3) The third anecdote is about a reading by three Latin American poets. I’d had a conversation with one in another context about how he might define “the lyric”. A question I have been asking, not to find the answer, but as a survey of popular opinion—the same way you might ask people on the street to show you Afghanistan on a globe and watch them point to the Peloponnese, Turkey, the Black Sea, the Caucasus, Georgia, or Iran. Just interesting to see what you learn. He hadn’t responded, only said, come to the reading, the poet I’m reading with embodies his/my idea of lyric poetry. Why? Because he is writing in/of/from the circumstances of the lived, the streets, the family and communities of his home environment. Each of the three readers was an interesting writer, and indeed, the first reader, Omar Pimienta, was speaking the language in and of his own situatedness. And the language was descriptive and designatory—it recorded what it embodied. The second, poet, Carlos Soto-Ramon, crafted a work in which a seemingly-appropriated official text was intercut with an account of the day Orlando Letelier was assassinated in Washington, D.C.—two contrasting languages and tones calling attention to each other. The final reader, Román Luján, began by performing a

linguistic mutation, morphing word-to-word through a hybrid deconstruction of language across the English/Spanish divide. The result was stunning, and also marked the clear distance between the language of depiction, appropriated language and his hybrid mix. Much more could be said, but each poet was equally self-conscious, deliberate in the selection of approach and mode. Each was a dramatic demonstration of what I consider to be aesthetic work: a deliberate act of calling attention to the work, as work, which considers and reflects upon its conditions of making through processes of composition, selection, and positionality within the broader/broadest linguistic field which also manages to inscribe within its own material production a marker of that process. Not formal innovation, strictly speaking, and not material experimentation necessarily, but work that in its formulation shows its own deliberateness and the decisions that form it through the conceptual work of the poet/writer. And this was instantiated, not stated in a critical gloss. The concept of among-ness is embodied in the particular identity of each poet's practice as an embodiment of their contemporary expression of traditions of poetic making and, also, constituted through their relations to each other. The specificity of each was sharply evident across the individuated instances.

At its current extremes of appropriation, literary practice looks with some pejorative disdain on this kind of craft, deeming its activity inadequate to the task of getting traction on language as it works in the broader culture. In that latter conception, only appropriate works against the sentimentalizing, individuating, personal voice and everything *made* seems provincial, circumscribed by its protected location within a space defined as literary. But that dismissive formulation misses the larger point that aesthetic activity has many zones of specificity, each able to perform certain cultural work through the particularity of its articulations. And of course, the question of whether literary work can *do* anything in the culture links to other arguments of long standing.

To reiterate, my argument is that the identity of the "literary" depends on two gestures: 1) a deliberate act of calling attention to language and 2) making that attention explicit in the work. Poetic discourse distinguishes itself by circumstances, by where/how it appears and thus asks, offers, to be received in a particular way, but also, by a kind of attention to the material of language. Some substantive cultural warrant attaches to this, some belief. But it is not of necessity "other," oppositional, only specific, particular, and identifiable. Rather, the identity of works is made among each other and within language.

Thus the value and identity of the aesthetic reside in that fact of deliberate production, not in any of the traditional constructions of *value* in this production. By

contrast, from classical poetics through modern avant-gardes, such values have been described variously: as emotional catharsis, moral uplift and/or epistemological enlightenment, sensual pleasure or entertainment, or political/ethical efficacy. These are freighted with expectations and requirements that are not essential to literary/aesthetic work, but which it is asked to do as justification on some cost analysis of moral accounting: to be redemptive, instructive, restorative, or salvific. Dependent on the “otherness” and “apartness” of the aesthetic, this expectation generates the idea that aesthetics is to take on all of the moral/ethical work not done elsewhere in the culture.

But what if the value of aesthetic experience is simply defined by the potential for it to register on awareness as significant, and to ripple through consciousness as a way to rethink and think otherwise about all/any sense I have of the sense I make of the world and sentience/experience I have in/of it in language, as per the poets just described. Not for some purpose, but for the opening it makes in the directed, instrumentalized approach to experience, its expression, articulation. Literature, poetics, becomes a place within the broad array of cultural activity, a specific place in which language is called to attention in all its aspects. Just that. Called to attention and marked by that call—for its ability to describe, depict, simulate, make, be a specific expression. I used to say, aesthetic experience is the space we make so we can have space for experience within the monoculture. But culture is heterogeneous, not monolithic, and aesthetic territory exists as made, a space among others, though it still has to be found to be engaged. Perhaps this work is also evolutionarily advantageous, or, rather, the demonstration of that advantage.

The point is to conceive the specific identity of aesthetic activity without opposition, otherness as specificity, not alterity, not pitched against. This makes it possible to conceive aesthetics as purposeless not purposeful, avoiding the problem that all directed energies are captured in advance by their oppositional strategy. Assigning that alterity to poetics locks literature into directed, instrumental, labor and puts a salve on a massive wound “as if—“.

Aesthetic activity becomes defined through the specificity of its practice, as one practice among many, one niche in the ecologies of language performance and expression. What distinguishes art from craft, aesthetics from sensation, poetics from other language, is that combination of the self-conscious awareness of being framed, named, set aside, distinguished through that call to attention and specific articulation so that the particulars of what is attended to can be noted, paid attention. Like sport, finance, entertainment, politics—aesthetics is a zone whose boundary conditions are fluid, porous, but specific. Even if we might want to preserve the imaginative faculty of thinking “otherwise” that so often characterizes aesthetic work, it can be conceived without the

charge for aesthetic work to be the moral conscience of the culture, to be the “other” of a fallen world through we reassure ourselves, as subjects of this notion, that all will be put right.

Attention to the work of attention—from which all else follows—is the defining characteristic of aesthetic activity, its distinctive identity among the rest of activity in the culture. Specificity without alterity, a condition of distinction among activities, removes the claim to moral superiority that inheres in perceiving the rest of the cultural activity as “other” to the aesthetic, a claim that has attached itself from habit of a line of critical theory as if it were an automatic property of aesthetics. That claim can only be justified by action after and through the work, it is not inherent in the simple definition or character of poetics or aesthetics.

In thinking about what constitutes “the literary” aspect of language, I want to make the link now to enunciation, and to the second part of my talk.

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Can the distinguishing act of aesthetics—the call to attention—be connected to the question of who speaks and how that is marked in/as poetic expression? In the examples above, the students’ clear dismissal of literature as irrelevant, or the critic’s celebration of it as a given without any critical examination, missed the point the poets made in their specific use of language. Their attention is marked and makes the work. This matters—it is the matter and work of *poetics*. Enunciation is the means by which *the call to attention* works. But can enunciation be imagined outside of structures of alterity?

In my twenties, a poet-friend challenged me with respect to my writing, which was obscure, complex, dense with self-referential interiority. “What about the Other?” he asked. I had no idea what he meant. “That,” he said, “is the/my point.” Interiority had been my mode, deep, intense, withdrawn, protective. Language was refuge, a place apart, without any thought of the other. I did not care for anyone in their else-ness, not inside the writing. I have never heard of this idea, concept, an other, what is that, might it mean? His accusatory tone did not waver.

This is the second “other” to which I want to pay attention, the subject of enunciation, the “other” I now associate with lessons from linguistic, psychoanalytic discourse, a construct essential to the anthropological, cultural, social, systems of power through the machinations of the symbolic. This is the “other” conceived as that which provides the subject its sense of itself as a subject. To cite Emile Benveniste’s 1970 formulation: *But*

immediately, as soon as he attributes the role of speaker to himself and takes possession of the language, he materializes the other before him, no matter what degree of presence he attributes to this other. All uttering is implicitly or explicitly an allocution, which posits an allocutor. (Langages, Mars, 1970)

Enunciation is always context dependent. It relies on “shifters”—terms whose value can only be determined in situ. I/you—by contrast to she/he/they/them which are identifiable, have a stable relation to a referent—are always defined contextually. Space and time, here/there, now/then are shifters. These shifters are constituting structures of discourse. They can only be understood by being present to the utterance where the placeholders are filled by speaker identity and spoken position. Linguists intent on finding features of “language” as a universal human system note that the distinction between I/you is something that is present, at the very least, implicit, in every human language system. The production of enunciated discourse also produces an enunciated subject, not an individual, but a position in relation to the discourse, its power structures, and its operations. This is the basis of Julia Kristeva’s analysis of the subject in a politics of linguistics and semiotics. For Lacan, this becomes the foundation of a theory of the subject of language. Neither assumes a speaker who uses language as a subject, but rather, see the constitution of a subject as a language act. (Language is not something the subject uses, but something that makes the human subject.) Erica Hunt’s recent work on pronouns examines the critical aspects of such positionality, the discourses of othering that replicate the violence of race, in particular, but also class, gender, ethnicity, and other categories germane to identity politics and their consequences. I have full respect for this critical attention to dimensions of the construction of the other, but this also motivates the attempt to think about subject formation and enunciation without the other.

In *The Material of Poetry*, Gerald Bruns makes the observation that “subjectivity” is not constituted merely by what we say/speak, by our own speech acts, but by what we receive, listen to, and language by which we are addressed either passively or actively, individually or within a group. This observation, so often overlooked in constructing theories of the authorial subject (even if used in constructing critical insights into the produced or enunciated subject of media artifacts, discourses, and spaces), is what underpins my proposal to think about the specific identity and forms of the nodal, distributed, transactional subject of various environments, a subject that exists among enunciations but is not other to or within them. Such an environmental subject exists in an eco-system of incidental as well as deliberate enunciation, in a field, not only an exchange, in a condition of amongness.

The idea that in every instance of communication, someone is being addressed by someone for some purpose may not hold. What if the subject/object distinctions, like other binaries, are no longer sufficient to explain the conditions of individuated being, identity, and enunciation, but only hark back to mechanistic constructions of identity in which it is the other against which the self makes itself. Can we rethink this into a more open set of constructions of subject formation?

This is the shift I want to introduce, to consider that not every articulation is intended as communication. I can receive an expression without direct address, by hearing, over-hearing, being within the field of perception. I do not have to be the “you” to an “I” who speaks in every instance. I may, instead, be something else—present to a field of enunciations and expressions of which I am a part, but not a binaristic other in the construction. Alternative constructions exist—pluralistic, not binaristic, present, but not oppositional or defining. I need not be in a relation of alterity with all enunciative acts. These are the “other others” of my title.

Can we take this back into consideration of the construction of authorial identity? Is authorial identity a privileged case of identity formation? Is literature merely a special condition of language? Can we have a discussion of engagement with literature after the individual voice and also not limited to human language, a poetics more broadly experienced, without slipping into some new age “sentience of the world” or agency of the inanimate?

Modernism’s long hold on our creative and critical imaginations stamped the notion of the individual talent onto every frame and document by which originality came to be the defining metric of aesthetic value. By the last quarter of the 20th century, conceptual writing in the “uncreative” mode had become institutionalized as well. In these practices, the acts of selection, framing, presenting are the work done, the acts that register intentionality, that call to attention that is the crucial aesthetic act.

But this is not the end of the story. Other parallel phenomena are on the rise. One is the creation of collaborative and collective identities and practices. Not yet fully mature, but emerging on the sidelines, is a form of collaborativity that seems driven by the activity of connection as much as by the need to make art or writing as a product. Experiential, communicative, affective, and motivated by absorption, the work does not necessarily

turn its invested labor into commodity, but into immediacy. The examples of fan fiction, of sites like *We Feel Fine*, author identities like Monty Canson, or collaborative writing platforms supporting group composition may still be far from gaining literary recognition, but not too far. These are still in the realm of human language, however and I want to answer the question of what the subject position of *non-human* enunciation might be as well.

I will offer two examples. The sound artist, Kalle Laar, has a work titled *Call the Glacier* which consists of a telephone hooked to a microphone within a melting glacier. You call the phone and when it picks up, the sound of the melting, cracking ice is what you hear. This is not pseudo-sentience, it is sound. But the “call” is an act that produces the receipt. I have called the glacier, asked for its sound, a sound in the world. It doesn’t “speak” in the usual sense, but it allows me to hear, to consider, to attend to the sound of its breaking, its dissolution, and being. This positionality as an aspect of enunciation allows us to think through human language relationally rather than oppositionally.

What is the enunciative activity of the world? If *Call the Glacier* is a call, an appeal, an attempt to engage, it is a call structured by the artist, obviously, not the glacier. The glacier is not sentient, it is not a being able to “speak” in any sense. Quite the contrary, the point is rather that it is not, and thus, the call is not to an other, but simply, an act of access to an acoustic experience as a phenomenon. In this situation, the spatial condition of listening is an enunciative formation not directed, not coming at me, not constructed in an I/thou formation of address. Instead, the experience allows me to be located amongst the multiplicities of sounds. These are not all language sounds, not at all, they are the sounds of the world, its articulations and expressions, and the subject becomes constituted within the field, matrix, of perception. The “me” is the underappreciated theoretical concept here, thought usually only in its narcissistic insular self-engagement, rather than as a replete transactional centralized node in the system of exchanges that constitute sentience and/or sensation without direct address. I have a relation to the sound, the experience, and am in a position in relation to it—but I am not made the “other” of its subject formulation, nor, vice versa. Again, I am among enunciations, not addressed by them or constituted in a binaristic structure of exchange, rather, in a location or position, of relations.

I want to finish with one more example, a work by Casey Reas, an artist who works with digital image streams and sounds. His recent exhibition, *Linear Perspective*, consisted of

works that were visualizations of data feeds, processed information, displayed as a remediation of graphical files.

Reas pulled images of faces from his twitter feed and then recycled them in rapid combinatoric display. Shifting endlessly from one to another, unstable, ephemeral as a rushing freshet of digital flow, the images are haunting. Only a partial view, glimpse, configuration coheres—and that, always just for an instant, an interval so brief it is just on the threshold of cognitive capacity for recognition. As if all the identities in the world were stacked into a single stream running before our eyes. Our own selves, those we know, and all the people in the world beyond our knowing all flash in sequence. The chance of finding ourselves is diminished to near zero. We can always almost see the faces, not quite recognize them. We hope to and fail in our impulse to do what humans do, see and process a face. Thus an incredibly powerful sense of loss is generated by the constant disappearance of an almost-recognizable image on the screens.

Finding and recognizing are so fundamental to identity. The possibility of knowing who we are depends, in part, on these reflective objects—things, signs, images—by which we reassure ourselves of some particularity in the mass of all other things. In the face of such abundant combinatoric possibility, the nearly infinite seeming procession of faces, where might we locate a self that is ours among the many?

Our subject position is effaced in such a situation. I cannot locate myself as a self, and yet, I watch, absorbed and fascinated, as if addicted to the impossibility of the very activity for which I most yearn. The human subject cannot constitute itself in such circumstances, only remember that it was once able to do so. Thus a longing is set up, a nostalgia for that lost (human) subject of technology. The sampling that activates the screen and the sound track is algorithmically driven. The result is machine poetry, incredibly hypnotic, remarkably absorptive. Sitting with the headphones, I lose all sense of time, of body, of anything but the feed and its rhythms and changes. I have never felt so close to a computational process, so affected by it, as if I were hearing the music of machines, program art, and algorithm-speak—articulated by the very impulses that drive an computational process towards self-realization. A mere projection of human desires onto the workings of a mechanical process? Instead, a recognition of what it is to be inside that sensibility, hear its own streams of configured articulation, its own thought-forms and expressions.

Somehow these works seem to express a certain too-late-ness for humanity, the impossibility of survival of our former notion of subject formation within an interior life and relation to the social forms of language and image. The World Picture doesn't need us. Identity formation seems to have shifted, into exteriority and surface recognition.

Even as we reach for recognition it flees in the rapid refresh of information of which we are mere minute constituent elements. Now, in these works, it is the point of view from within the technological apparatus that positions us, testifying to the impossibility of recovering human subjectivity. The computational apparatus enunciates, but we are not its other, not part of a subject formation. Who speaks and how is someone spoken in this situation? How can we bring the conversation back to the literal convention of enunciation?

The machinic tracks, generated from sampling, the sounds of the apparatus call out. As in the situatedness within the speaking world, so, within the frenetic cries or mournful whine of the machine sounds, the impossibility of being constituted as a subject becomes apparent. I can only be a *me* here, in this set of conditions. I suggest, that instead of “otherness” the notion of “amongness” prevails. Situated, locative, within the rich uncertainties and shifts of phase that are the stochastic condition of indeterminate complex systems. Poetics/poiesis, acts of making and of aesthetics/aesthesis are the mere but essential marking of attention to the call. This, I suggest, is the condition of *literature* after human language, in an extension with the sounds of the world and circumstances of production that engage an enunciative subject without an other, and an other without a subject, in conditions of among-ness, rather than binaristic othering.

The distinct identity of aesthetic activity, poetic language, inheres in its capacity to call attention to and make a distinction within the field of language. This is a zone within the culture, not apart, an experience space among others. The time of tongues is past. The world is speaking—but not *to* me—not in an I/thou relation, but rather, around me. I am in it and of it. Recognition of this among-ness, and of the non-privileged place of humanity within it, seems crucial, essential fundamental to survival. This is the eco-poiesis towards which I gestured at the outset, the being within, a particularity and specificity without alterity, an environmental subject that recognizes human specificity but brackets human exceptionalism within a field of enunciative activities. The recognition of distinction enacts identity without alterity, without a privileging of subject positionality—of self to other, human to non-human, animate to inanimate, us to world. It works instead on a premise of amongness within an abductive process in which specificity is relational, located, situated, and particular.

After speaking in tongues

Take sound from air and human speech in acts of subtraction poetics and the leftover empty space is scant. We suck the pauses up, search for intervals, in need of non-existent desperate silence. The earth wobbles on its turn, still a little more inhabitable than the dry dust planets cracking with ice, little sub-worlds, far away, relatively speaking—and speaking they are. The standing up of machines on their hind legs frees their jointed arms for food gathering and more speaking, gesturing, making signs out of that same air that breaks with sound waves and patterns in mind and mined fields. No agriculture troubles their brows, only the furrowing lines of engines plowing the lawns and turning the earth into lines of text, unreadable but semiotic none-the-less. The soil turning makes only a soft blanket hush that never disturbs the gears of the equipment. The song they were singing was made of compressed air, and so light the melody hung on the breeze and rippled across the lanes of traffic the barking dogs the engine noises and the roar of city services. Our back yard orchestra has gone to sleep already, dawn chorus subsides and an opera drawn from life is not quite the experience of a lifetime. Cats will and possums do and squirrels as well, but the noise factor from the leaf blowers tops them all. The machines are winning, and many of them are no longer made of moving parts. They sigh and wiggle and work their way into our affections without any need for lubrication.

Poetics grows up domesticated, like a dog, its bark reverberating in a group, then on a stage, holding forth. With meter and metrics the art advances, structured from body breath and motion, the short bursts and the long holding, the exhalation and the inward draw, into the chest, into the stomach, feet, hands. The stomping effect of form on language is to make it perform like song. All that went on a long time, after all, and the somatic pleasures of verse account in some large part for its popularity, letting the tricks of staccato and accent roll around in the mouth and on the tongue. The meaning of verse is an effect but the metric of it is the sound fact. On it goes, into shape-forms, numbers of this and that circumscribed, proscribed, adhered to. Dance steps for the intellect. Perform accordingly. Alterations and exchanges. Forms also come in the luggage, hitch a ride on a trade route, get noticed at court, picked up off the street, overheard in the market, found in the back rooms, the bar rooms, the public square. The whole panoply of possibilities is populated by variant species of some things that are the same and some that are other. Human speech, human speaking, that prevails, even with the use of drums, guitars, the flutes and clarinets that take our breath away, even with all of these overarching them all is speech. Acts. Language. Synthesizer. The final transition to a light load on a heavy processor outputs as simulation. We don't mind, amused by the voice that is not ever ours. The machines should be allowed to talk, to us, for us, with us, their servile guiding tone, responsive to requests. Not a threat. Not even a hint or whisper of an intelligence

comes through. Nor should it. The sub sub level of production is in the offerings to use, in the new vocabulary of out-sourced sound files and types, the tones of inaudible and audible outputs take their place alongside the sighing springs and snapped elastic of an earlier era.

Not the language of machines, not language in machines, not language coming into or out of machines, but the very takeover of soundnoise rhythms of the material world—animate, inanimate, mechanic, organice—produced how where, and so our self-adjusting ears adapt and produce alternate interiorities and external vibrations unlike the other sounds of prior utterance. A helicopter overhead beats with its wings and praises its own singing. The noise music and the sound forms all escape and make new waves into the world. Our transformation hardly matters and goes with little notice unspoken, unsung.

The time of tongues is past.

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