

MetaFormances

by Marisa Jahn

Abstract

MetaFormances is a correspondence-based project that took place between 2005 and 2007. Miming the protocol of business form letters, the letters request their recipient to perform absurd, erotic, and illicit behavior in order to transform the letter into something else. As I see it, the recipients' correspondence signals their readiness to play, to accept their role in the transubstantiation of the letter, to believe in the metaphysical force of the delicate printed word, to extend a joke.

Each letter was mailed via overnight express courier along with a disposable 35 mm. camera and self-addressed, self-stamped envelope. The project engaged a motley crew of 32 characters – a mailman, a confettiologist, a Dutch man, a computation origami expert (and his dad), a porn artist, a pinata factory, a psychoanalyst, etc. As stand-ins for my own body, the letters enable an exploration of the forbidden, the otherwise inaccessible, the abject. Through this process of substitution, the the letters (symbolically) venture towards carnality, enacting rites of death, wish-fulfillment, and regeneration. The letters thus provide a way establishing communion, limitlessness, and transcendence. As its title suggests, MetaFormances is a project that investigates the in-between, restructuring authorship as vector; content as traversal; form as process.

This thesis explores various topics related to the notion of an epistolary game. For instance, in my examination of the suppression of the body within writing, I draw example from Julia Kristeva's notion of "obscene language", Jacques Derrida's "écriture batarde", and Doris Sommer's "bilingual aesthetics." In investigating both the historicity and affective aspects of a scriptural economy, I consider literary critics (Barthes, Derrida) and cultural historian Francis Barker. I draw from film theorist Giuliana Bruno and the psychoanalytic perspectives (Freud, Lacan, Kristeva, Zizek) to consider object-relations such as the substitute, the fetish, the specter, the transubstantiate. I conclude by comparing the eschatological figures of (in)finity in the writing of Kristeva, Bataille, Foucault, and Derrida.

**MetaFormances:
The Hermeneutics of Play in Language/Art/Life**

by

Marisa Jahn

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'MetaFormances' is dedicated to Erik Carver.

(this book is typeset in "M to the J" - a font made from Marisa Jahn's handwriting.)

Introduction

MetaFormances is a correspondence-based project that took place between 2005 and 2007. Miming the protocol of business form letters, the letters request their recipient to perform absurd, erotic, and illicit behavior in order to transform the letter into something else. As I see it, the recipients' correspondence signals their readiness to play, to accept their role in the transubstantiation of the letter, to believe in the metaphysical force of the delicate printed word, their complicity in extending a joke.

Each letter was mailed via overnight express courier along with a disposable 35 mm. camera and self-addressed, self-stamped envelope. The project engaged a motley crew of 32 characters – a mailman, a confettiologist, a Dutch man, a computation origami expert (and his dad), a porn artist, a pinata factory, a psychoanalyst, etc. I knew about half of the recipients; the others I found after extensive searches for recipients who I thought would “play along.”

It was impossible to get responses from all the recipients. I got a lot of rejections. Most of those who responded did so after I pestered them with polite reminder emails and phone calls that followed proper business protocol. I used my best phone voice and invoked my most illustrious epistolary skills as I could possibly muster, deployed my ten years' training as an administrator and grant-writer. A few of the recipients responded of their own accord. It seemed to me that they did so because they felt that I had somehow incised their day-to-day life. Some explicitly told me this is how they felt. Several of the letters I wrote returned to me without warning, a year or two after I had mailed them off.

The process of letter-writing unfolded organically according to some logic that I processually discovered. During this working process, I needed to have some way of understanding the rules of the epistolary exchange, so I wrote them down exactly as they presented themselves to me. Most of the time, the logic governing the letters (the choice of the recipient, the request I suggested, the approach, etc.) made themselves clear to me through revelatory moments in which I imagined myself to be an ecstatic sociopath or thoroughly repressed Victorian pervert. It's the recognition of this double consciousness that I believe is contained here in this essay.

Fundamentally, this essay explains why I wrote the letters. I don't consider myself a religious person but somehow these letters invoke a sense of religiosity. To me, the letters are meditations on life, death, and alterity; the letters utilize myth and symbolism to suggest transcendence, abjection, violence, communion, reincarnation, faith, etc.

MetaFormances culminated in the form of an installation and a book (this essay). Along the way towards its closure, MetaFormances was exhibited or performed in various gallery spaces from 2006-7 that helped me develop the project. These venues include Showa Kinen Park (Tokyo, Japan), The Lab (San Francisco), Moles Not Molar Series at The Rotunda (Philadelphia), Space Other (Boston), the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Cambridge, US), Second Gallery (Boston), and more. Many thanks to those

Notes on Methodology

Polyphony as Method

We are all the time selecting to communicate in different interrelated socio-linguistic registers. Complimentary, different, they convey similar messages in different tones. Imbricated, they resound.

Embracing plurivocality, I therefore split this text into three voices. My intention is for this chorus to rejoin and echo one another; through this play I hope to show their respective virtues and limits.

Embodied Voice

The first voice narrates the series of correspondences exchanged with others over the period of a year and a half. Crude and naive, at times reflective, this spoken register ventriloquates the colloquial discourse of personages that I mime:

—the wistful voice of a ten-year old naif

—a “dude” voice assumed with close friends who know that its deployment mocks its patriarchal presuppositions

—the voice of an obsessive. Its propositional inflections is intended to build the reader’s perception of a hyperbolic and hysterical narrator. Purposefully maniacal, this is the voice of the humunculus—that exteriorated devil that drives its narrator towards mischief.

Stylistically, this voice finds inspiration, sanction, and aegis from writers such as Henry Miller, whose protagonists’ excess articulates trails of thought you refuse to otherwise recognize; Kafka, whose allegories geometricize from the most banal details; Dostoevsky, whose frightfully stumbling protagonists only affirm; Jerzy Kaczynski, whose gruesome tales shock, and Michelle Tea, whose protagonists are both pitiful and strong. What these writers share is their willingness to accept human fallibility—moments of pathetic grovelling, fear of death, perversion, abjection, and their converse: the desire redemption, the capacity for inspiration, for limitlessness—and their appreciation of what literary critic Michael Bakhtin referred to as ‘grotesque realism’. Describing the fundamental tenets of ‘grotesque realism’, Bakhtin writes, “Exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style.”^a Its narrator storytells like a carney barker. Excessive, they are excused only through maintaining their story and continuing their spell. Bakhtin writes, “The barker of a show would not be accused of heresy, no matter what he might say, provided he maintained his clownery. Rabelais maintained it.”^b

Voice of the Proper

Present in the form of business letters, the second voice parodies the restraints of workplace etiquette. This voice is almost-violent, almost-psychotic, almost-mystical, almost-maniacal, thoroughly repressed.

Exegetical Voice

The third voice interprets and locates this text within other discourses. It contests universalized notions of desire, language, and play. Destabilizing and decentering, this voice instaurates MetaFormances within an array of other discourses.

Writing For The/Its Self

Language, like currency, forms a means of exchange between others – it draws close and repels, gathers and obscures meaning, transposes. Inexact exchanges foreground its gaps and rules. In this way, intentionally pushing language past inexactitude and towards sonority reveals the tenuous nature of signification. Simply put, only by pushing language towards error does one find its rules. About this non-purposive writing that rejects and willfully flounders communicative norms – how might we think about the significance of its transgression? How might this breach expose the historicity of speech and writing, the contingency of its mediation? By recognizing the way language cleaves and codes, how do we then find the way to work its rules anew, cast or refigure its players, and rewrite its score?

Permit an extended example. A cover letter is a professional letter that accompanies a proposal. As the document that goes on top of the grant, the application, the proposal, cover letters form the ‘face’ of the project. Following a highly specialized formalized protocol, the faciality of cover letters readies the addressee’s attention towards the documents beneath. The cover letter elicits the interest of its reader by describing the arc that connects writer with reader. As the career coach on JobStar.com writes, “It is regarded as a sign of laziness to send out a cover letter that is not tailored to the specific company...it gives you another chance to emphasize what you have to contribute to the company or organization.”^c Other career advisors suggest platitudes such as, “Use the first line to grab the reader’s attention” and warn to “Never, ever use threatening or suggestive language; never make the reader feel uncomfortable.”^d Betwixt and between official written discourse and private epistolary communication, the successful cover letter entices while following professional protocol.

When this protocol is violated—barring the sender’s aspirations, fears, desires --the sender obviates the possibility of a polite and swift rejection. The cover letter that reveals too much becomes coarse, manipulative, perverse, vulgar, embodying the characteristics Mark C. Taylor describes as attributes of the ‘bastard’. “Bastards appear and (disappear) to enact impropriety. Accordingly,

I was born in Dallas, Texas, where my first grade teacher taught us to tease and attenuate our vowels (“bray-oun ” instead of “brown ”, etc.). My father was born in China and my mother in Ecuador, which makes my brother and I Chinkadorians. My parents met in an elevator in Dallas, and they don't speak each other's first languages. I first learned English, then pigeon Spanish in order to keep secrets with my mother. My uncle Guillermo, who lived with us on and off again, always had at least two large black dogs - usually quite rowdy - that he'd keep in the yard with our dogs. Guillermo's dogs responded best to Spanish. When Guillermo and his dogs would go back to live in his little trailer in the floodplains, we'd speak to our dogs again in English.

In 1945, my father's sister was given up for adoption to the French ambassador to China as my grandmother fled to Taiwan. Driven by the urgent need to deliver cheeky ripostes to this set of older teen cousins, I learned French in school. My brother Jason learned Chinese, so he's

my ex-bike - Ann(telope)

my ex-ex-bike - Hound

I try and name my roommate's possessions but I can tell that sometimes he's a little resistant.

I have always been fascinated with the way that language gives form to process, being, and gesture. Language makes things things; language also misleadingly makes things things. It services, signifies, and points to something other; at the same time, language is a thing in itself - scratches on a blank page, hands gesturing to make a sign, bytes whirling about a computer. Language astonishes the most when it's barely anything at all.

Vocationally, I earn my living by writing for others. People hire me as a grant writer, a publicist, a freelance writer or editor, a database designer, a business strategist, human resource manager, job coach, etc. There's a pleasure in this writing in the third person with no ego investment in the task at hand. The rapid clip of keyboard tapping generates immediate reward: order transubstantiated in the form of

letters of recommendations
college essays (not necessarily my own)

written discourse (such as the private diary, a space of confession), or sublimated within the margins of writing.

Thus, under the sovereignty of the modern graphosphere, expediency is predicated on a self-removal: in budgets, form letters, grants, and databases, the individual voice or corporal presence is inimical to an objective order. I am interested in the moment when the 'grain of the voice' bleeds through and exceeds the normative strictures of a bourgeois protocol. Rebellious and haunting, this (abject, obscene, bastardly) excess reminds us of our own pretensions in assuming that the letter was ever something other than a transmission from one human to another. What is this 'insubstantial place at the margins' of the graphosphere—the place where the corporal elision is incomplete, where the body or voice begins to emerge—perhaps inappropriately—rendering all at once, in a way that may not have been previously perceptible, the massive corporal suppression involved in the scriptural production of a bureaucratic hegemony?

business plans
databases
fifty two hundred budgets
fifty two times ten sub-bud-
gets
resumes
sixteen hundred brochures
marketing sales pitches
six million grants
newsletters
3 million press releases
12 billion fax cover sheets
two billion cover letters
automatic bank deposit author-
izations
k-12 curricula
4 million permission slips
insurance forms for night-
clubs, parties, exhibitions,
corporate luncheons, etc.
forms for planting trees in
urban areas
contracts for artists
contracts for venues employ-
ing artists
memoranda of understanding
legal exemption forms
bar tallies
etc.

and for all kinds of people:
carpenters
tree planters
tree wanters
construction managers
dads
moms
curators
teens
teens' moms
teens' moms' brothers
artists
teachers

conductors
parents
highschool students
the dude from the pub
and his wife
policemen
Turkish rug store owners
fishermen
fishermen's neighbors
engineers
people I have never met
etc.

Now, I am telling you that I am an extremely proficient administrator, and there is no shortage of situations that people want to employ such people to help organize their bureaucratic quagmires. Most of the time, administrating can be relaxing; its ends are knowable, discrete, finite. In pursuit of this pleasure I find myself in search of places where order is needed. I usually regard this task as a challenge to implace a robust infrastructure of well-chosen words whose crystalline lattice withstands any incident.

And while monetarily remunerating, or perhaps because of it, this bureaucratic paper pushing drives me to total madness. The practice binds me to the computer, tap-tap-tapping away for hours on end - an egregious disuse of the body and its gift of motility. The writing becomes stale, scripted. This ennui induces

a kind of sadness and fury.
It instigates an impulse akin
to that which compels bureau-
crats to steal paper clips or
photocopy their naked butts
after work when no one's
around.

How can I save language from
this instrumentalization?
How can I recuperate language
as that simplest and most
tenuous of gestures which
brings blood to the cheeks,
pumps adrenaline through the
muscles, dries the mouth and
makes it fall agape?

I want
the discovery of a phrase de-
scribing what you thought was
ineffable
the surprise of a well-drawn
metaphor
the exaltation or embarrass-
ment at the reception of a
letter addressed to you, and
only you.
the feverish panic induced by
an improper address.

I want to feel the weight of
a simple apostrophe or con-
junction, whose presence or
absence can determine so much.

I want to see and feel the
way that language returns
mangled and strange, tangled
up in incidence.

The Hermeneutics of Play in Language/Art/Life

Rule #1. The Hunt for the Game, or Establishing Players and Terrain

If you have ever hunted or fished, you will know that success is predicated on listening well. With bass fishing, for instance, you will want to notice the angle of light as it hits the variegated regions of the water. How might the temperature of the water and air above effect the fracturing of light? What is the time of day, and how will the acceleration of the sun as it exceeds its noon apex effect the clarity of vision from the fish's perspective? What is the speed of the current and how will this effect the weight of your fishing line? What are the colors of the rocks and stones beneath the surface of the water? What weeds and algae grow on these surfaces, and what colors present a stark contrast? In what season are you fishing, and in what developmental stage are the grubs and insects

In an essay about the Surrealists' appropriation of Oceanic art in the early to mid 20th century, art historian Philippe Peltier describes the hunter's self-preparation for the moment of discovery. In the search for the object, the hunter readies him/herself for the sign that points.

"Discovery is an activity that requires keeping one's mind unfettered while also maintaining a state of alertness. Clarity is achieved at the moment the found object signals to you. As Breton wrote in one of his most beautiful texts, (L'Amour Fou), discovering a found object is like a bolt out of the blue, a magical moment that transports you to the core of your existence and crystallizes your desires in a lightening flash. Attention now shifts to the object . . . This the gateway to collecting."^m

For Peltier, then, part and parcel with the object's discovery is the preceding moment of self-reflection. Discovery, then, may have little to do with the object itself but its anticipatory desire. In "The Storyteller", Walter Benjamin also describes the affective dimension structuring an acquisition. While this 'acquisition' for Peltier is in the hunt for the object, for Benjamin's storyteller, the sought-after thing is the story. In either case, the end-goal is neither object nor reportage but their raconteur's experience. "[The story] does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. The travels of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel."ⁿ For Peltier and Benjamin, discovery and storytelling enriches one's sense of belonging in the world. Through narration, the individual affirms the constructive relation between

subject and surrounds.

For Kierkegaard, the process of loving one's surroundings is an ethical imperative that precedes the determination of meaning. He writes,

"Even the least, the most insignificant, the most unimpressive, the poor little flower disregarded by even its immediate surroundings, the flower you can hardly find without looking carefully—it is as if this, too, had said to love: Let me become something in myself, something distinctive. And then love has helped it to become its own distinctiveness, but far more beautiful than the poor little flower had ever dated to hope for. What love!"^o

In other words, for Kierkegaard, self-acceptance and self-love is predicated on the love for another. ". . . true love, the self-sacrificing love, which loves every human being according to his distinctiveness, is willing to make every sacrifice—it does not seek its own. Love does not seek its own. . . ." ^p It is this selfless attendance towards the other that founds Kierkegaard's philosophy.

Undergirding the explorer's hunt for the artifact, the storyteller's search for a story, and Kierkegaardian is the quest for the exotic Other. Driving this search for that which baffles, edifies, and inspires is the desire to swoon in the face of difference and self-reflexively assess one's assumptions about selfhood. Oppositional to a model of ontological self-containment, this model of openness towards alterity (otherness) posits selfhood as a constructive process by which the self extends outwards, adjusts, and renews in relation to contingency and incidence. Martin Buber identifies the desire for heterology as a "primal longing for relation."^q He writes:

In the drive for contact (originally, a drive for tactile contact, then also for optical contact with another being) the innate You comes to the fore quite soon, and it becomes ever clearer that the drive aims at reciprocity, at "tenderness." But it also determines the inventive drive (Urbebertrieb) . . . and thus the product is "personified" and a "conversation" begins.^f

Buber further suggests that the "craving for the You" is a necessary component to a child's development. To summarize, for Buber, self-actualization is predicated on the relational involvement.

Only through reciprocal exchange is the stranger within^s

surrounding your local fishing spot? From what angles can you occlude yourself from the fish beneath? This environmental or atmospheric listening determines whether you choose the lavender rubber worm with glitter or no glitter, the weight of the line, the size of your plumb bob, the force of your cast into the water.

similar logic governs the hunt for the proper recipient to the prurient letter. Observe the details of the systems around you - the relative speed of traffic, the hiding places within the institutions you visit, the way the store displays their chocolates, those offices where coffee breaks take place, the ease of communication amongst a crowd, the color of the soil in the planter outside the mini-mart, etc.

Now squint. Blur things a bit, gain some perspective. Locate that person or thing whose agency stands out. Someone whose existing patterns and habits you can harness. Someone who might share your love for language, letters, paper, and the mail. A confettiologist already has an intimate and everyday relationship with paper, as does a pinata maker. A computation origami expert

already transforms the flat plane of paper into sculpture. Alternately, you may locate a certain relationship with your target that may not be initially apparent to them. In such a case, you will have to carefully explain this connection. The most important criteria is to choose someone that you think wants to play along, someone who will want to play your game, someone who has been waiting to receive your letter.

Choose your target well, because you are going to fall in love with all the details of their life. You will graft yourself to the letter recipient's milieu and only through this self-displacement it will become in part yours. Through your letter you will stitch and suture.

You may ask why begin this endeavor at all. You are writing this letter because you have to. You need the response of the other to know you are alive. You cannot yourself verify whether you are alive; there is no way for you to alone prove whether you exist as an individual subject within a continuum. You need the Other. You can know that they are singular. You can recognize them as agents in all of their historical specificity. If you can

discovered. Further, this mediation between Self and Other is where one recognizes boundaries, one's own particularities, one's historicity. In those moments when one anticipates approaching the heterological Other, one deliberates the proper address, switching modes of communication, protocol, lexa—or what Doris Sommer refers to as a game of “code-switching” and “side-stepping.”^t Through the process of weighing modes of self-presentation or translating between socio-linguistic registers, the subject at that moment occupies a philosophical relation to language. Writes Sommer: “Bilinguals develop a ‘metaconsciousness’ to coordinate (Bakhtin might say orchestrate) alternative ego-positions and to withstand shocks with more mechanisms than monolinguals deploy.”^u This metaconsciousness is that antechamber where the binaries such as subject/object, familiar/distinct, I/Thou, etc. commingle, where the language is de-universalized. Underscoring the ideological importance of agonistic difference^v in democratic polity-formation, Sommer writes, “[Externality] is also a condition of democracy. In bilingual aesthetics, externality is always visible and audible and it goads movement rather than marks impassés. Multitongued engagements are opportunities for a range of performances and asymmetrical receptions.”^w For Sommer, an aesthetics of difference drives (“goads”) movement forward and offers surprise. As Sommer writes, “. . . jouissance happens when one tongue invades another.”^x When “rubbing words the wrong way feels right”^y, when codes collide, the effect produced embraces risk-taking, worldly engagement.

Taking Sommer's focus on linguistic bilingualism as a point of departure for thinking about a more generalized notion of hybridity, I am interested in those moments in code-switching between socio-linguistic registers and protocols. What happens in that brilliant hand-to-hand encounter between the etiquette adopted for one's inlaws, the propriety of a business letter, the contemplative or interrogative tone of the academic inquiry, the crudity of the first person narrative?

In this game, its players are not just code-switchers but code-hackers and the terrain is those things “-meta.”

elicit their response, then
you in turn can know you too
exist. Like so: Not the I
think I am but instead, I
see that you exist; and if I
can reach out to you and elicit
a response, I know you exist.
By extension I know that I
too can exist.

Rule #2.

The Approach, or Mediating Alterity

You need to know how you are going to enter into the life of your target--the Other. First, imagine the normative everyday processes of that person's life. What objects do they distractedly toy while talking on the phone? Where do they lunch, what surfaces and signposts do they pass as they leisurely take their snack break? What do they do in the office or workshop after work when the boss has left and they are last ones there left with the charge to turn out the light. They turn around and retreat to the office to do something - what do they do?

Now, imagine you are the letter. Determine the way in which you intercept that person's life. What papers do they handle, shred, wrap, crumple? Or, how do you, as the piece of paper, relate to other things happening

Replete with the trace of its procession—stamps, wrinkles, stains, tears—the postal letter suggests its sojourn—the post office, the mailman's bag, the mailbox, the desk of its addressee, etc. Delivered directly into the home of another, the letter becomes a gift, signal, Trojan-horse, imposter, or augur, gaining access to places otherwise unavailable. Handled by both writer and reader in moments of solitude, letters invite intimate moments of the touching and viewing. A stand-in for the body of the corporally absent Other, the sensuality of epistolary exchange operates through “the very reversibility of the flesh, where touching also means being touched.”^z

How is it that the letter so uncannily evokes an imagination of its geographic travel? How does the notion of an embodied visuality assist in understanding the symbolic force of the written letter? How does understanding the relationship between visual and haptic sensing help explain how we phenomenologically apprehend the world?

In *Atlas of Emotion*, film critic Giuliana Bruno problematizes the assumption that Western post-Enlightenment philosophy singularly privileges vision over other senses. By locating counter-examples, Bruno presents an epistemological thread that binds vision and touch as the sensations involved in geographical travel and self-location. In Etienne Bonnot de Condillac's *Treatise on the Sensations* (1754), Bruno points to the passage where the author describes the limitations of vision: “The eye in itself is incapable of seeing space outside itself.”^{aa} But despite the inadequacy of vision, the sensation of touch “extends” the sensation of sight--“We are led to attribute to sight ideas what we owe to touch alone”—leading Condillac to

conclude that the human perception in fact synchronously deploys and commingles vision and touch to achieve a sensory apprehension of the world. Condillac summarizes, "When considering the properties of touch I came to the conclusion that it was capable of discovering space and also of instructing the other sense to relate their sensations to bodies extended in space. . . With the aid of touch, [the eyes] come to judge objects which are in space."^{ab}

Building from Condillac and other philosopher's phenomenological writing, Bruno presents her own thesis about the commutability of the senses. She writes,

Touch is a sense actively involved with the locomotive capacity of the body and with its kinesthetic perception. Because the haptic realm is not simply inclusive but "comprehensive" of this motile touch and its kinesthetics the haptic, in a way, becomes an actual geographic sense. In our haptic experience of reaching, an extended, imagined, and even global touch is achieved. Hence contact, exploration, and communication are to be considered haptic activities. . . A participatory aspect is at work in this kine(sthe)tics, for the haptic involves a sense of reciprocity. The haptic, as its etymological root suggests, allows us to come into contact with people and the surface of things. Thus, while the basis of touch is a reaching out—for an object, a place, or a person (including oneself)—it also implies the reverse: that is, being touched in return. . . Furthermore, we should consider that, as a receptive function of skin, touch is not solely a prerogative of the hand. It covers the entire body, including the eye itself, and the feet, which establish our contact with the ground. Conceived as such a pervasive enterprise, the haptic sense actually can be understood as a geographic sense in a global way: it "measures", "interfaces", and "borders" our relation to the world, and does so habitually.^{ac}

Bruno's assertion that "the haptic sense actually can be understood as geographic sense in a global way" explains how we phenomenologically understand the written letter as an import from the space of the Other: in touching the letter, by extension we understand the way that it interfaces with the world. When receiving a letter we apprehend the sum-total of deferred "interfaces" involved in arriving at its destination. Through this imagined passage, the letter—received from locations faraway or local—metonymically imply their vector of geographic navigation.

But the MetaFormance letters traverse both geographic and psychic boundaries. Sent on an indulgent course,

in their life? When you determine this logic, consider how it feels at the moment of this encounter. Do they handle and hold you with grace? Do they pin you to the cork board of their office cubicle? Do they pull you to their nose, inquiring whether they might detect the trace of a scent? Do they rip you into bits and open their hand so you are strewn as far as the wind carries you...one snippet landing in a puddle, sinking to its depth; another part of you flying past the quizzical stares of squirrels chattering in the park; more bits bumping awkwardly getting stuck and unstuck, stuck and unstuck by the snares of the Bermuda crabgrass banking the sea? Dissimulated across a terrain, you are like a school of fish, alive as both singular unit and mass.

¹ From conversation with Francisco Ricardo, April 2007

they venture towards carnality. Soliciting its recipient to place the letter inside their body, to touch their blood, to violently shred it to bits, to instigate its decomposition, the letters symbolically enact rites of sex and death. Taking up Freud and Mary Douglas' theories on totemism, taboo and purity, we return to Kristeva's assertion that abjection is 'socialized' as the inverse of law and order:

The abject is related to perversions. The sense of abjection that I experience is anchored in the superego. The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law, but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts, uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them. It kills in the name of life—a progressive despot; it lives at the behest of death. . . That is the socialized appearance of the abject.^{ad}

Thus, abjection and order involve a mutual disavowal. Summarizing Kristeva's position, Elizabeth Gross writes that for the child, taking up of the symbolic order entails a the codification of body and speech.

The ability to take up a symbolic position as a social and speaking subject entails the disavowal of its modes of corporeality, especially those representing what is considered unacceptable, unclean, or anti-social. The subject must disavow part of itself in order to gain a stable self, and this form of refusal marks whatever identity it acquires as provisional, and open to breakdown and instability.^{ae}

This necessarily "disavowed part of [the] self" refers to those parts of the corporal and social body that are deemed impure and unstable.

What happens when this "disavowed part of [the] self" is personified? What agency does this figure, devil, or humunculus assume? Slavoj Zizek describes the psychic liberation in deploying an object-thing to substitute for the self: "By surrendering my innermost content, including my dreams and anxieties, to the Other, a space opens up in which I am free to breathe: when the Other laughs for me, I am free to take a rest; when the Other is sacrifices instead of me, I am free to go on living with the awareness that I did atone for my guilt; and so on."^{af} For Zizek, psychic displacement—whether as god or fetish—in fact regulates normalcy. Even for the individual who "knows better", their self-consciousness does not obviate the experience of cathartic release.

Fulfilling escapist and scopophilic fantasies, the MetaFormance letters exceed and invade borders, passing through a sea of hands that relay and relay and relay the letter towards its destination until it is finally deposited directly into the private domestic interior of another.

Rule #3.

The Appeal, or Soliciting Communion

Consider your language, your tone, the mechanisms of your appeal to the Other. You are the letter, and you want them to love you so that they share with them your own love for language. You want them to feel the delicate force of a single word all its metaphysical tremor. Find the way your letter will close the distance between you and the Other. You want them to do anything for the sake of language as you too have done.

At the same time, make sure that when the Other responds you allow them to speak. Do not demand that they respond, but instead give them the prerogative to speak or not, to play along with your game or not. Their non-complicity is their right.

You want to what they have to say. Do they comply with your request? Do they reject your

Within epistolary communication, the intended reader may be its recipient (the dialogist), the reader of the letter-never-sent (the voyeur), the scriptor him/herself (the monologist or narcissist). So too, there may be multiple audiences. Regardless of putative addressee, each entreats its reader to devote their rapt attention. For Roland Barthes, the desire in written language is refractory: "What we desire is only the desire the scriptor has in writing, or again: we desire the desire the author had for the reader when he was writing, we desire the love-me which is in all writing."^{ag}

In epistolary communication, when the letter stands in for the corporally absent scriptor or reader, the schema of epistolary correspondence takes on a liturgical process that conflates the letter with lover: a thoughtful literary composition signifies the writer's devotion to its recipient, the sending of the letter is analogized as a bodily emission, the reception of the letter signifies the addressee's reception of desire. In Paper Machine, Derrida writes:

Paper echoes and resounds, subjectile of an inscription from which phonetic aspects are never absent, whatever the system of writing. Beneath the appearance of a surface, it holds in reserve a volume, folds, a labyrinth whose walls return the echoes of the voice or song that it carries itself; for paper also has the range or range of a voice bearer. . . Paper is utilized in an experience involving the body, beginning with hands, eyes, voice, ears; so it mobilizes both time and space.^{ah}

He laments:

I do slightly miss the long time, the intervals, and the rhythm that then used to mark the history of written text, all its comings and goings before publication. It was also the chemistry of a conscious or unconscious process of maturation, the chance of mutations in us, in our desire, in the bodily closeness with our text in the hands of the other.

^{ai}

In other words, paper is an exteriorated 'subjectile' that reveals and conceals the body. As an external boundary of the body it becomes a prosthetic locus of sensual pleasure. The erotic pleasure of the text emerges from within this metaphysical tension between body and paper, the dotting intimacy one bestows on paper, the time and space created through reading and writing.

In *Postcards: From Socrates to Plato and Beyond* (1987), a series of letters exchanged between Derrida and a putative lover, the author writes, ". . . you see that I am writing it to you, you are touching it, you are touching the card, my signature, the body of my name--and it is indeed you who, now, right here. . . --do you love me?"^{aj} Upon receiving his lover's letter, Derrida writes: "I am spending my time rereading you."^{ak} The plot unfolds through the sending and receiving of correspondence and complicates as their epistolary exchange supersedes their relationship.

Presaging the problem of conflating epistolary exchange with the relationship itself. Derrida writes, "You yourself explained to me that the jealousy begins with the first letter."^{al} And later, "[I can hardly bear] the day when you no longer will let me put the dot on my Is, the sky will fall on my head and the fall will be endless. . ."^{am} For Derrida's protagonist, the love of language has replaced the lover for another. As Freud warns, "The case [of fetishism] becomes pathological only when the striving for the fetish fixes itself beyond such determinations and takes the place of the normal sexual aim; or again, when the fetish disengages itself from the person concerned and itself becomes a sexual object."^{an} In failing to distinguish the love for another with the love of language, language becomes the fetish that overshadows the lover's primacy.

The monological nature of Derrida's letter is made clear when Derrida demands that the recipient of his letters return to him all the letters he sent. Enraged, she responds, "Whose letters are these, anyways?" Derrida has assumed they are his; in doing so he has annulled her voice. Lacan considers the discovery that the addressee of epistolary exchange is the scriptor

demand? Do they exceed your request? Do they take over your project as their own and cast you aside?

Do not forget that you need their response and not your own. You can handle this uncertainty, this unknowable, and it is in fact what you crave. You want to open your wide your sense to see and hear the Other.

himself. "Might a letter to which the sender retains certain rights then not belong altogether to the person to whom it is addressed? Or might it be that the latter was never the true addressee?"^{ao} Lacan explicates the ethical consequences of narcissism's demand. "Demand already constitutes the Other as having the 'privilege' of satisfying needs, that is, the power to deprive them of what alone can satisfy. The Other's privilege here thus outlines the radical form of the gift of what the Other does not have—namely, what is known as its love."^{ap} For Lacan, when the demand formulates the Other as the one who can fulfill, this designation objectifies the Other, thus denying him/her of a selfless love. "[The demand for a response] annuls the particularity of everything that can be granted, by transmuting it into a proof of love, and the every satisfactions demand obtains for need are debased to the point of being no more than the crushing brought on by the demand for love."^{aq} In other words, when the proof of love pre-structures a response, it obviates an authentic response. Summarizing Lacan's notion of narcissistic love, Mark C. Taylor writes about the individual who is unable to recognize their image-reflection (the imago) as split from the self; he/she then is unable to see the Other and collapses the Other into his/her own ego:

The pleasure that the specular ego longs for arises through a process of 'identification'. . . Since it is ruled by the principle of identity, the pleasure-seeking ego is inevitably 'auto-erotic'. In different terms, the effort of the speculative I/eye to see itself in every 'other' is essentially narcissistic. The love of the 'I' is always an amour-propre. Such narcissistic love is inseparably bound up with aggression. Unwilling to tolerate difference, the 'loving' 'I' seeks satisfaction by dominating others and assimilating difference. This struggle for mastery is the psychological form of the 'will to power' that Heidegger believes to be characteristic of the modern philosophy of the subject.^{ar}

The 'specular ego' then both seeks to identify with and destroy its object of identification. The narcissistic drive characterizing the epistolary exchange in Postcards resounds throughout Derrida's other philosophical writings which assume love is always a self-love, or amour-propre (a return to oneself). But to understand Postcards as a mediation on love overlooks the epistolary exchange as a mediation with death and the Unconscious.

For Derrida, the emission/reception of postcards is likened to the game (Fort/Da) played by Freud's infantile grandson

who throws and recoils a spool of thread in response to his mother's egress and return. Freud and Derrida speculate that this repetition of this game permits the child to witness presence/absence, death/return. This pleasurable and painful impulse originates from what Derrida refers to as the self-appropriating drive ('proper' or 'se proprier'), a drive stronger than both life and death that involves a self-distancing and self-return--a telos. Derrida articulates the mechanics of the 'proper' drive:

The step must occur within [the organism], from it to it, between it and itself. Therefore one must send away the non-proper, reappropriate oneself, make oneself come back [revenir] (da!) until death. Send oneself [s'envoyer] the message of one's own death. Such would be the function of these component drives: to help (auxiliary function) to die one's own death, to help (function of assistance: to assist in death) in death's being a return to the most proper, to the closest to oneself, as if to one's origin, according to a geneological circle: to send oneself [s'envoyer].^{as}

In other words, the exteriorizing drive within "geneological circle" takes place through the heterological Other. "Heterology is involved, and this is why there is force, and this is why there is legacy and scene of writing, distancing of oneself and delegation, sending, envoi."^{at}

Despite his intentions of scripting a role for the Other, one is always left wondering whether there is indeed a place for radical and unpredictable alterity within Derrida's universalizing philosophy. What happens if the Other doesn't want to take part in Derrida's solipsistic mediations with death? Derrida writes of the resistance within the echo¹ but what happens when the echo is an embodied voice with an agenda of its own? What happens when the voice of the Other is a chorus?

¹ See Derrida's writing on Echo and Narcissus in *Positions*.

Rule #4.

The Delivery, or, the Medium and its Specter

Write your letter. Print it on paper. Even better, send it via overnight express. You want to communicate the urgency of your request. But also, you want to surprise your recipient by the printed word exposed and vulnerable, like the nature of your request.

You want to expose the materiality of text, to make visible the substrate that enables printed letters to appear as disembodied signifiers. Analogous to 19th century Impressionist painters who, through broad and coarse brush strokes, dismantle pictorial illusions, the gesture intends to reinscribe a corporeal presence into the otherwise seamless transmission of formulaic bureaucracy. It's a hunt for the fingers that grasp the pen or touch the computer keyboard, the hands

A specter of speech and an almost-drawing, the printed word lies between. The printed word mystifies by its capacity to cajole and spurn, to mirror (e.g., mimesis) or officiate (e.g., performative utterance). In a recent riposte to the charge that his speeches were more fluff than substance, Massachusetts governor Deval Patrick alluded to the language's historical role in enacting social change. "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal" -- just words," . . . "We have nothing to fear but fear itself" -- just words. . . . 'I have a dream' -- just words. They're all just words."^{au} Patrick suggests that mere words bear significance on the course of history and justice.

Invoking the metaphysics of the printed word, Derrida writes, ". . . and I write to you that I love the delicate levers which pass between the legs of a word, between a word and itself to the point of making entire civilizations seesaw."^{av} The majesty of language, again, is its ability to command from the position of its near-absence, its near-nothingness. It is language's evanescent quality that renders its material substrate haunt all the more.

In an age of electronic communication, the materiality of paper gains in its evocative force by virtue of its near-obsolescence. At this particular moment in time, email communication surrounds the exchange of paper documents, supporting paper's legacy as signifier of the real. For instance, even today, contractual exchanges between entities may involve the preliminary exchange of emails that ensure and confirm the reception of the paper document. One might even attach an electronic document whose parameters (8.5 x 11 inches with one margin

border) refer to original paper documents. And still, one prints out important documents as a guarantee against the short life-span of electronic data storage. The spectrality of the paper document is all the more prescient to those traveling from industrialized and lesser-developed places where paper documents still reign.

In essence, the preeminence of a dematerialized writing technology (e.g., email exchange) produces the paper letter's fetishistic and spectral puissance. Slavoj Žižek writes, ". . . in our postmodern age, what we witness as the gradual dissipation of the very materiality of the fetish."^{aw} Žižek uses the example of electronic money, a dematerialized medium whose spectral presence we sense only through its effect. ". . . the paradox is that with this spectralization of the fetish, with the progressive disintegration of its positive materiality, its presence becomes even more oppressive and all-pervasive, as if there were no way the subject can escape its hold."^{ax} According to the "progressive disintegration" of "positive materiality," the email stands in for the paper letter, which stands in for the word spoken by the absent Other, which stands in for the Law (per Lacan) or the Other (per Žižek). Moreover, the spectralized fetish signifies by summarizing or invoking the entire (synecdochal) chain of replacements. "[It is a] paradoxical fact that the dimension of universality is always sustained by the fixation on some particular point."^{ay}

In this way, by understanding the implicatives invoked by the printed word, the player of language games finds a well-stocked storehouse for linguistic repartee...

*that open envelopes, the eyes
that read the contract, the
voice within the written word.*

You want your letter to haunt.

*Do not forget to include
the disposable camera. You
want to see the lives of the
Other but you do you not
need the proof that they
exist. You have to begin
with the assumption that
they exist, and that unlike
Doubting Thomas, you do not
need to touch the wound to
believe. However, you DO
want to impart to the letter's
recipient that they have been
chosen or elected to do what
they might not normally do.
You want to allow them that
privileged moment when they
do not know whether their
complicity is right or wrong.
This thrill is the gift you
bring. As the mailman said
upon receiving my letter, "I
don't know if this is art or a
prank but I guess it doesn't
matter." The recipients'
use of the camera signals
their willingness to be a part
of the game.*

Rule #5. The Rapture, or, Pleasure in the Hermeneutics of Play

stalking is hard work. Thus, throughout your pursuit of the Other, it is imperative to keep diligent notes. Follow up and use any means and medium necessarily to ensure your letter's reception.

Developing a shorthand. For instance,

*"1/m v/m 2/3/06 20 "00,
c/b 2/3/06 21:00 -s/t Mona
recept xBill "*

to signify:

"I called and left a voicemail on February 3rd, 2006. Make sure to call back later today in one hour; try to speak to the receptionist named Mona and try to call when the receptionist named Bill will not pick up the phone. "

Don't underestimate the

In games whose rules are unknown, the ideal player is someone enticed by the prospect of writing its rules anew, someone who willfully suspends belief, someone who opens towards the future. The temporality of the indeterminate game is an endless "what if" and "remember when"; its tone is interrogative (questioning existing order and law), propositional (suggesting anew), and reflective (recalling an alternative). As a protected space of deferred judgment, players by definition must be ready to trust. In this way, the hunt for a player is a search for someone with whom to keep secrets. As the anthropologist Johan Huizinga writes,

The exceptional and special position of play is most tellingly illustrated by the fact that it loves to surround itself with an air of secrecy. Even in early childhood the charm of play is enhanced by making a 'secret' out of it. This is for us, not for the 'others'. What the 'others' do 'outside' is no concern of ours at the moment. Inside the circle of the game the laws and customs of ordinary life no longer count. We are different and do things differently.^{az}

Huizinga suggests that the space of play is a self-contained space that sets itself apart from a broader set of (hegemonic) order. The mystery of the game is the logic of its self-containment, the system of its governance. Writes Huizinga:

Inside the play-ground an absolute and peculiar order reigns. Here we come across another, very positive feature of play: it creates order, is order. Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary, a limited perfection. Play demands order absolute and

supreme. The least deviation from it 'spoils the game', robs it of its character and makes it worthless. The profound affinity between play and order is perhaps the reason why play, as we noted in passing, seems to lie to such a large extent in the field of aesthetics.^{ba}

Play, then, offers a temporally delimited space for transgression of social mores, intensification of feeling, assumption of alternate personage, and more. Exuberant and excessive, oppositional to normativity, play can only ephemerally exist. The ephemeral nature of play draws attention its bounded nature: "Indeed, as soon as the rules are transgressed the whole play-world collapses. The game is over. The umpire's whistle breaks the spell and sets 'real' life going again. . . Play beings, and then at a certain moment it is 'over.' It plays itself to an end."^{bb} The importance of sanctioned transgression is underscored through anthropological examples in which the individual self-liminalization is regarded as a socially-regulating rite of passage. In his field investigations of the Nbemtu, a Central African tribe, anthropologist Victor Turner studied a ritual in which adolescent boys become temporarily dispossessed of their belongings, divested of their status in society, and appear different through dress and costume. He describes the social importance of 'liminality':

Liminality may be partly described as a stage of reflection. In it those ideas, sentiments, and facts that had been hitherto for the neophytes bound up in configurations and accepted unthinkingly are, as, it were, resolved into their constituents. These constituents are isolated and made into objects of reflection for the neophytes by such processes as componental exaggeration and dissociation by varying concomitants.^{bc}

Those in this state of 'liminality' are considered ontologically separate from the social whole, a bifurcation reflected even in the grammatical use of a separate noun structure to refer to these youth. In their bounded state, they are endowed a freedom to temporarily create alternate structures of meaning. Turner writes, "Liminality is the realm of primitive hypothesis, where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the facts of existence. As in the works of Rabelais, there is a promiscuous intermingling and juxtaposing of the categories of event, experience, and knowledge, with a pedagogic intention."^{bd} Significantly, these youth then undergo a ritual to be re-integrated back into society.

While theorists such as Huizinga, Victor Turner, and

importance of keeping diligent notes. Once you start cultivating more than one target, your mind may become easily confused. But you cannot afford to mix up the details.

Consider using a mail service that you can count on. You can't afford for your letter to get lost in the mail. Choose a courier service where you can get ahold of someone on the other end of the phone and where the manager is visible.

Take pleasure in your exactitude, the measures you take to prepare for your recipient's encounter with the letter.

Throughout the process of sending your letter and your investigative processes, you are forcing yourself to attend to every phenomenon as a possible evidence, proof, clue, or cue.

You may find yourself in search for the perfect stamp that might pique the interest of the other.

You may find yourself researching the life and work of the other for the exact word that binds you to them, that might invoke their recognition of your shared passion for language - an 'aha!'

You may find yourself

reverting to numerology to interpret the days between their last correspondence and yours.

You may find your life structured around your mail box, constructing elaborate excuses for visiting the mailbox multiple times a day. You may find yourself urging the postmaster to see whether there is not really one more piece of mail in his sorting bag that might be yours.

Your phenomenological apprehension of the world is converted to a hermeneutics of the everyday, an interminable search for signs. Take pleasure in this ecstasy.

The continued search for signs will leave you exhausted and hysterical. You will need to invent an alibi, an out, a way to bring yourself back to normalcy. You need someone to initiate you back into the world of normative operations, to usher you from the limns of your madness. You may need to invent this humunculus or devil who can save you from your ridiculous ecstasy.

'Art' may offer such an aegis. By declaring your actions as art, however, you pay the price of flattening your love for the reader.

Caillois^{be} focus on the social function of rituals such as play, the 20th century hermeneutic philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer methodologically shifts the anthropological gaze from the production of play to its philosophical consideration. Imparting to the field of study his phenomenological heritage, Gadamer consistently de-ontologizes social givens and interprets them in terms of process and perception. For example, Gadamer questions whether it is not the game that grips its players but instead the player's capacity to participatorily enact a sacral space of play through the discovery of its order:

The attraction of the game, the fascination it exerts, consists precisely in the fact that the game masters its players. . . The real subject of the game is not the player but instead the game itself. What holds the player in its spell, draws him into play, and keeps there is the game itself. This is shown by also by the fact that every game has its own proper spirit.^{bf}

For Gadamer, the game's "proper spirit" appears as transcendent, unfolding for its players to interpret. "[Play] presents itself" through the player's negotiations and interactions and takes place as a process 'in between.'^{bg} In other words, the search for a player is ultimately the desire to achieve a state of that ecstasy in which the game reveals itself, delimits the playing field (terrain), names its players, and proscribes the actions. Huizinga describes being apprehended by this rapture: "The joy inextricably bound up with playing can turn not only into tension, but into elation. Frivolity and ecstasy are the twin poles between which play moves."^{bh} This ecstasy and frivolity occurs when the individual perceives him/herself as an agent within a larger unfolding system.

Similarly, the protagonist of Derrida's Postcards engages in the tragicomedy of a letter-writer's agony and ecstasy--the writing and rewriting of the same two lines, the nod from the mailman, the incessant anticipation of an auspicious sign, signaling an the letter's reception and response, etc. Derrida writes,

When I am creating correspondence, I mean when I write several letters consecutively, I am terrified at the moment of putting the thing underseal. And if I were to make a mistake about the addressee, invert the addresses, or put several letters into the same envelope? This happens to me, and it is rare that I do not reopen certain letters, after

having failed to identify them by holding them up to the light at the moment of throwing them into the box. My sorting and my postal traffic is this scene. It precedes and follows the last pickup, the other one, the next one, or the one I missed. The obsessional moment occasionally lasts beyond the imaginable. Once the letter or the lot of letters is gone (I have finally unclenched my hand), I can remain planted in front of the box as if before an irreparable crime, tempted to await the following pickup in order to secure the facteur and to take everything back, in order to verify at least one last time the adequation of addresses.^{bi}

For Derrida, the postoffice and mailperson personifies the site of epistolary convergence. Perceived with heightened sensibility, they become folded into the protagonist's drama. Describing his relationship with his postmaster, Derrida writes, "I think she really understands me, she would like to take part in a great scene that she does not see, she treats me a bit like a son who comes to make obscene confidences to her."^{bj}

Like Derrida's protagonist who knows he himself invented the "postal pleasure," the player of the make-believe game is likewise lured by the game that seemingly possesses an interior logic. Writes Gadamer:

The players are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation (Darstellung) through the players. . . The movement backwards and forward is so central to the definition of play that it makes no difference who or what performs this movement. The movement of play as such has, as it were, no substrate. It is the game that is played – it is irrelevant whether or not there is a subject who plays it. The play is the occurrence of the movement as such.^{bk}

For Gadamer, play is not just the discovery of transcendent order and ontological thresholds. "Play is more than a subjective act. Language is more than the consciousness of the speaker; so also it is more than a subjective act."^{bl} Gadamer uses the term "transformation into structure" to name this process by which language or play become "something more":

I call this change, in which human play comes to its true consummation in being art, transformation into structure. Only through this change does play achieve ideality, so that it can be intended and understood as play . . . Transformation means that something is suddenly and as a whole something else, that this other transformed thing that it has become is its true being, in comparison

with which its earlier being is nil. . . Thus transformation into structure means that what existed previously exists no longer. But also that what now exists, what represents itself in the play of art, is the lasting and true^{bm}.

Gadamer's invocation of ever-lasting 'truth' problematically recalls the universalist claims of Kant's transcendental consciousness. Nonetheless, I find Gadamer's description of this process useful for describing the experience of the player who perceives the game's rules as exterior and requiring divination. But Gadamer also puts forward that "genuine play possesses besides its formal characteristics and its joyful mood, at least one further very essential feature, namely the consciousness, however latent, of 'only pretending'. The question remains how far such a consciousness is compatible with the ritual act performed in devotion."^{bn} Assenting to the player's double consciousness, Gadamer continues:

Play fulfills its purpose only the player loses himself in play. Seriousness is not merely something that calls us away from play; rather, seriousness in playing is necessary to make the play wholly play. The player knows very well what play is, and that what he is doing is 'only a game'; but he does not know what exactly he 'knows' in knowing that.
^{bo}

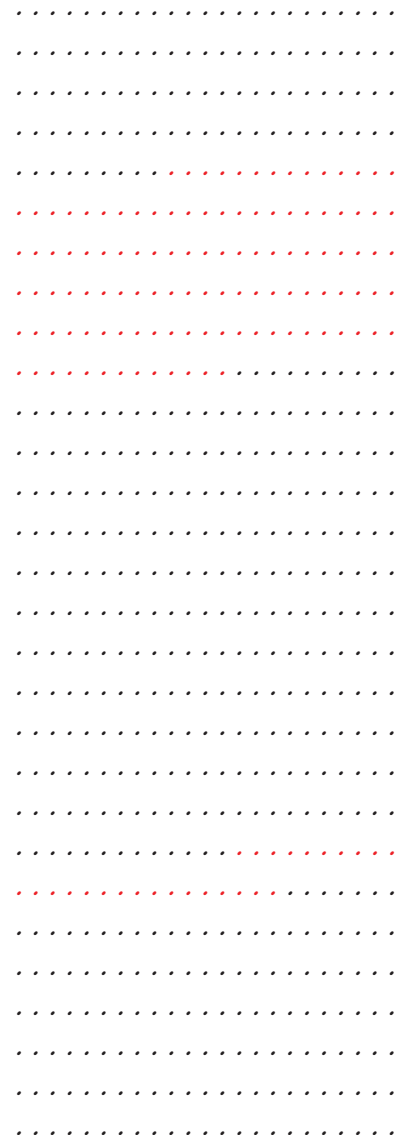
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Conclusion

The Rejoinder, or, Ellipses & Eschatology...

I take up Derrida's consideration of the ellipses -- ". . . ." - that figure of speech that extends declarations into time and space. Through their textual insertion, the ellipses ambiguates the preceding and succeeding declaratives, reframes them as either quasi-questions, and defers resolve. For Derrida, the conclusion of a book (a production delimited by an author and reader) signals its return as a text (discourse divorced from its authorial creation and open to interpolation). Through the death of the author, the book is (re-)inaugurated into the continuity of discourse. Derrida describes the process by which the ellipsis paradoxically both closes a statement and joins it to others: "Within the elleipsis, by means of simple redoubling of the route, the solicitation of closure, and the jointing of a line, the book has let itself be though as such."^{bp} Through its indeterminacy, the ellipses thus commands, luring the reader and writer towards transcendence. "It is there, but out there, beyond, within repetition, but eluding us there. It is there like the shadow of the book, the third party between the hands holding the book, the deferral within the now of writing, the distance between the book and the book, that other hand."^{bq} Conceived in terms that echo the structure of Freud's drives, Heidegger's 'Being towards Death', and Nietzsche's 'eternal return', Derrida writes,

. . . what disposes it in this way, we now know, is not the origin, but that which takes its place which is not, moreover, the opposite of an origin. It is not absence instead of presence, but a trace which replaces a presence which has never been present, an origin by means of which nothing has begun. Now, the book has lived on this lure: to have given us to believe that passion, having



with which its earlier being is nil. . . Thus transformation into structure means that what existed previously exists no longer. But also that what now exists, what represents itself in the play of art, is the lasting and true^{bm}.

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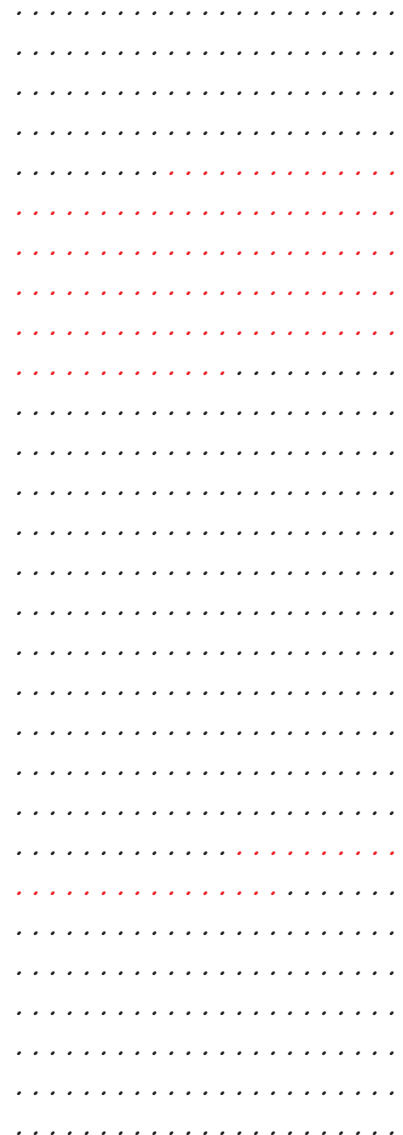
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The Rejoinder, or, Ellipses & Eschatology...

I take up Derrida's consideration of the ellipses -- ". . . ." - that figure of speech that extends declarations into time and space. Through their textual insertion, the ellipses ambiguates the preceding and succeeding declaratives, reframes them as either quasi-questions, and defers resolve. For Derrida, the conclusion of a book (a production delimited by an author and reader) signals its return as a text (discourse divorced from its authorial creation and open to interpolation). Through the death of the author, the book is (re-)inaugurated into the continuity of discourse. Derrida describes the process by which the ellipsis paradoxically both closes a statement and joins it to others: "Within the elleipsis, by means of simple redoubling of the route, the solicitation of closure, and the jointing of a line, the book has let itself be though as such."^{bp} Through its indeterminacy, the ellipses thus commands, luring the reader and writer towards transcendence. "It is there, but out there, beyond, within repetition, but eluding us there. It is there like the shadow of the book, the third party between the hands holding the book, the deferral within the now of writing, the distance between the book and the book, that other hand."^{bq} Conceived in terms that echo the structure of Freud's drives, Heidegger's 'Being towards Death', and Nietzsche's 'eternal return', Derrida writes,

. . . what disposes it in this way, we now know, is not the origin, but that which takes its place which is not, moreover, the opposite of an origin. It is not absence instead of presence, but a trace which replaces a presence which has never been present, an origin by means of which nothing has begun. Now, the book has lived on this lure: to have given us to believe that passion, having



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“oceanic”^{by}--a term Freud used to refer to limitlessness and continuity. Like the game of Fort/Da, the ellipses enables the witnessing of death and transcendence. Spectrally present, the ellipses drives the work towards its eschatological rarefaction and that moment where, by virtue of its externality reveals the historicity of its own production. The ellipses opens the statement towards others, inviting its interpolation, a call for the Other to partake. Like the Surrealist game of Exquisite Corpse in which one part of the figure is drawn, then left for others to successively fill, the ellipses is an invitation for the heterological rejoinder.

Appendix

(Career Advice from <http://www.career.vt.edu/JOBSEARC/coversamples.htm>, accessed 5/4/07)

All cover letters should:

Explain why you are sending a resume. Don't make the reader guess what you are asking for; be specific: Do you want a summer internship opportunity, or a permanent position at graduation; are you inquiring about future employment possibilities?

Tell specifically how you learned about the position or the organization — a flyer posted in your department, a web site, a family friend who works at the organization. It is appropriate to mention the name of someone who suggested that you write.

Convince the reader to look at your resume. The cover letter will be seen first. Therefore, it must be very well written and targeted to that employer.

Call attention to elements of your background — education, leadership, experience — that are relevant to a position you are seeking. Be as specific as possible, using examples.

Reflect your attitude, personality, motivation, enthusiasm, and communication skills.

Provide or refer to any information specifically requested in a job advertisement that might not be covered in your resume, such as availability date, or reference to an attached writing sample.

Indicate what you will do to follow-up.

In a letter of application — applying for an advertised opening — applicants often say something like “I look forward to hearing from you.” However, if you have further contact info (e.g. phone number) and if the employer hasn't said “no phone calls,” it's better to take the initiative to follow-up, saying something like, “I will contact you in the next two weeks to see if you require any additional information regarding my qualifications.”

In a letter of inquiry — asking about the possibility of an opening — don't assume the employer will contact you. You should say something like, “I will contact you in two weeks to learn more about upcoming employment opportunities with (name of organization).” Then mark your calendar to make the call.

(“What Makes a Good Cover Letter”. JobStar.com, accessed 5/5/07.)

1. No spelling or typing errors. Not even one.
2. Address it to the person who can hire you. Resumes sent to the personnel department have a tougher time of it. If you can find out (through networking and researching) exactly who is making the hiring decision, address the letter to that person. Be sure the name is spelled correctly and the title is correct. A touch of formality is good too: address the person as “Mr.,” “Ms.,” “Mrs.,” “Miss,” “Dr.,” or “Professor.” (Yes, life is complicated.)
3. Write it in your own words so that it sounds like you--not like something out of a book. (Electra gets in trouble with libraries when she says things like this.) Employers are looking for knowledge, enthusiasm, focus.
4. Being “natural” makes many people nervous. And then even more nervous because they are trying to avoid spelling errors and grammatical mistakes. If you need a little help with grammar (do they still teach grammar?)--check out the classic work on simple writing, Strunk & White’s [Elements of Style](#), published in 1918 and now online. A good place to begin is [“Chapter 5: Words and Expressions Commonly Misused.”](#)
5. Show that you know something about the company and the industry. This is where your research comes in. Don’t go overboard--just make it clear that you didn’t pick this company out of the phone book. You know who they are, what they do and you have chosen them!
6. Use terms and phrases that are meaningful to the employer. (This is where your industry research and networking come in.) If you are applying for an advertised position, use the requirements in the ad and put them in BOLD type. For example: the ad says--

(sample cover letter from <http://www.career.vt.edu/JOBSEARC/coversamples.htm>, accessed 5/4/07)

Your Street Address
City, State Zip Code
Telephone Number
Email Address

Month, Day, Year
Mr./Ms./Dr. FirstName LastName
Title
Name of Organization
Street or P. O. Box Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. LastName:

Opening paragraph: State why you are writing; how you learned of the organization or position, and basic information about yourself.

2nd paragraph: Tell why you are interested in the employer or type of work the employer does (Simply stating that you are interested does not tell why, and can sound like a form letter). Demonstrate that you know enough about the employer or position to relate your background to the employer or position. Mention specific qualifications which make you a good fit for the employer's needs. This is an opportunity to explain in more detail relevant items in your resume. Refer to the fact that your resume is enclosed. Mention other enclosures if such are required to apply for a position.

3rd paragraph: Indicate that you would like the opportunity to interview for a position or to talk with the employer to learn more about their opportunities or hiring plans. State what you will do to follow up, such as telephone the employer within two weeks. If you will be in the employer's location and could offer to schedule a visit, indicate when. State that you would be glad to provide the employer with any additional information needed. Thank the employer for her/his consideration.

Sincerely,
(Your handwritten signature)
Your name typed

Enclosure(s) (refers to resume, etc.)

(Note: the contents of your letter might best be arranged into four paragraphs. Consider what you need to say and use good writing style. See the following examples for variations in organization and layout.)

(advice to students on applying to jobs, from the Writing Center at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, http://www.rpi.edu/web/writingcenter/cover_letter.html, accessed 5/4/07)

Audience

A cover letter provides, in a very real sense, an opportunity to let your prospective employer hear your voice. It reflects your personality, your attention to detail, your communication skills, your enthusiasm, your intellect, and your specific interest in the company to which you are sending the letter.

Therefore, cover letters should be tailored to each specific company you are applying to. You should conduct enough research to know the interests, needs, values, and goals of each company, and your letters should reflect that knowledge.

Notes

- a Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*, 232.
- b Ibid., 215.
- c "What Makes a Good Cover Letter". *JobStar.com*, accessed 5/5/07.
- d See various articles on how to write a cover letter in the Appendix
- e Derrida, Jacques. *Positions*. quoted through Taylor, Mark C. *Altarity*, 280.
- f Ibid.
- g Kristeva, Julia. *Portable Kristeva*, 111.
- h Barthes, Roland. *The Rustle of Language*, 41.
- i Derrida, Jacques. *Paper Machine*, 41.
- j Barker, Francis. *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection*, 8.
- k Ibid., 62.
- l See Barthes, Roland. *The Rustle of Language* and *The Pleasure of the Text*.
- m Peltier, Philippe. "Oceania: Objects of Revelation and Desire," 66-7.
- n Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, 5.
- o Kierkegaard, S. *Works on Love*, 270
- p Ibid., 274.
- q Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*, 78
- r Ibid.
- s See Kristeva, Julia. "Strangers to Ourselves."
- t See introduction to Sommer, D. *Bilingual Aesthetics*.
- u Ibid., 13.
- v "agonistic democracy" is the term deployed by Chantal Mouffe in various writings.
- w Sommer, D. *Bilingual Aesthetics*, 60
- x Ibid.
- y Ibid., 59.
- z Henri Lefebvre quoted through Bruno, Giuliana. *Atlas of Emotion*, 258
- aa Bruno, Giuliana. *Atlas of Emotion*, 252.
- ab Ibid.
- ac Ibid., 254.
- ad Kristeva, Julia. *Portable Kristeva*, 241
- ae Gross, Elizabeth. "The Body of Signification," 86.
- af Zizek, Slavoj. *The Plague of Fantasies*, 109.
- ag Barthes, Roland. *A Barthes Reader*, 41.
- ah Derrida, Jacques. *Paper Machine*, 44.
- ai Ibid., 26.
- aj Derrida, Jacques. *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, 73.
- ak Ibid., 50.
- al Ibid., 15.
- am Ibid., 26.
- an Freud, Sigmund. *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, 567.
- ao Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits*, 19.
- ap Ibid., 278.
- aq Ibid., 276.
- ar Taylor, Mark C. *Altarity*, 99.

- as Derrida, Jacques. *The Postcard*: 355-6.
- at Ibid., 256-7.
- au Helman, Scott. "Patrick, Obama campaign share the language of 'hope,'" *The Boston Globe*: 4/16/07.
- av Derrida, Jacques. *The Postcard*, 278.
- aw Zizek, Slavoj. *The Plague of Fantasies*, 103.
- ax Ibid.
- ay Ibid.
- az Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, 14.
- ba Ibid., 10.
- bb Ibid., 9.
- bc Turner, Victor. *A Forest of Symbols*, 105.
- bd Ibid., 106.
- be For more information on the anthropology of games, I recommend the following: Johan Huizinga (*Homo Ludens*, 1950), Roger Caillois (*Man Play and Games*, 1933) and Victor Turner (*A Forest of Symbols*, 1967)
- bf Gadamer, Hans. *Truth and Method*, 106.
- bg Ibid., 109.
- bh Ibid., 21.
- bi Derrida, Jacques. *The Postcard*, 102.
- bj Ibid., 110.
- bk Ibid., 103-4.
- bl Ibid., xxxiii.
- bm Ibid.
- bn Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens*, 22.
- bo Ibid., 103.
- bp Derrida, Jacques. *Writing & Difference*, 296.
- bq Ibid., 300.
- br Ibid., 295.
- bs Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*, 300.
- bt Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 127.
- bu Veyne, Paul. "Foucault Revolutionizes History," 161.
- bv Gross, Elizabeth. "The Body of Signification," 88.
- bw Bataille, George. *Erotism*, 12.
- bx Bataille, George. *The Unfinished System of NonKnowledge*, 5.
- by In his opening paragraph to *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Freud begins by describes his repartee with a colleague who admonishes him for failing to properly comprehend the true source of religious sentiment. Freud's colleague describes, "This [sensation] consists in a peculiar feeling, which he himself is never without, which he finds confirmed by many others, and which he may suppose is present in millions of people. It is a feeling which he would like to call a sensation of 'eternity', a feeling as of something limitless, unfounded--as it were, 'oceanic'" (Freud: "Civilization and Its Discontents" in *A Freud Reader*: 723). Somewhat humorously, Freud then concludes that while the notion of the 'oceanic' posed a challenge to his theories, he could in fact not discover the 'oceanic' feeling within himself.

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