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"*How shall I say it ... ?*" Relating the nonrelational

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Abstract. As the ideas of the relational and relationality become part of the everyday conceptual make-up of human geography, in this paper I seek to recall the insistent and incessant importance of the nonrelational. In dialogue with nonrepresentational theory, as well as its critics, I suggest that any thought or theory of relationality must have as its acknowledged occasion the incessant proximity of the nonrelational. The occasion for this discussion is a consideration of the relationship between suffering, pain, or passion and the thematising actions of representation, communication, narrativisation, and theorisation. Such affections, it is claimed, present social science with a particular problem, a problem which revolves around an irreducible nonthematisability within these dimensions of corporeal existence. Drawing on the writings of Butler, Derrida, and Levinas I offer an account of how this problem or impasse allows for a rethinking of the ethical within social analysis and of the nature of representation, corporeality, and intersubjectivity.

"Two fidelities: to respect the untranslatability of the idiom, certainly, but at the same time to apprehend that untranslatability otherwise."
Jacques Derrida, quoted in de Vries (2002, page 319)

"One must take up speech again, because it is, in a certain way, inaudible."
Jean-François Lyotard, in Lyotard and Thébaud (1985, page 39)

1 Introduction

The relational is very much on the agenda in human geography. Yet while there is, as Massey (2004, page 5) notes in a recent special issue of *Geografiska Annaler B* dedicated to the topic, widespread argument for and agreement upon the theory that 'in one way or another' identities are 'relationally constituted', the implications of this reconceptualisation remain somewhat obscure. Indeed it should perhaps be a cause for some concern that so many diverse theoretical strands, from constructivist analyses of the formations of identity, to the material semiotics of actor-network theory, to questions of scale and debates over the spatiality of the political, to the vitalistic monism of Deleuze, have all converged—in geography at least—on this one term. Although these various approaches may be usefully bound to the term 'relational' insofar as through it they seek to put paid to any remaining essentialism in the theorisation of position, place, or space, it is far from clear that there is any substantive agreement or indeed considered theorisation of what is actually meant by the term 'relation' and the consequences of a 'relational turn'. Without such consideration there is, I believe, a great danger of simply reinstating in another form the metaphysical and ontopological presuppositions that the idea of the relational is, as I understand it, meant to challenge. Without such conceptual labour the 'challenge of relationality' risks becoming simply a matter of a quantitatively expanded sociospatial imaginary rather than a shift towards the appreciation of intervallic topologies, complex figures, and diverse phrases and regimens. Indeed there is, I believe, a great danger that what is most *of* the relational, what is most challenging about the relational—that the basic and irreducible quality of

relation is, as Gasché writes, "nothing but the trait of being-held-toward-another" (1999, page 9)—will get closed down into a soporific and somewhat self-satisfied holism, be it constructivist, pragmatist, phenomenological, or vitalist.[1] So not for a second wishing to argue against 'thinking relationally', in this paper I present a discussion of the most simple but arguably the most significant differentiation on and of this theme; an argument for the insistent and incessant import of the *nonrelational*. Simply put, it is my conviction that as the hollow gives the essence of a jug, the 'nonrelational' relates the 'relational'.

My aim in this paper is to begin to unfold some of the consequences of this aporetic—rather than what we could call structural or immanentist—understanding of relation and relationality. The context or occasion for this discussion—and the explanation of the title—is a consideration of the relationship between suffering, pain, or passion and the thematising actions of communication, narrativisation, and theorisation. The claim throughout the paper is that such affections present us—as social scientists—with a particular problem. In section 2 I give the contours of this problem in more detail; however, a brief introduction is necessary here. I understand this problem to revolve around what we could call an irreducible nonthematisability within these dimensions of life and so, on one level, around questions of loss and gain in the apprehension by and translation of such affections into the schematisations of social analysis. What is happening, for example, when we recount, narrate, and make 'storyable', render intelligible, accountable, and observable, and thereby deliver to comprehension and theory, such singular and traumatic occasions as the death of a loved one or experiences of extreme helplessness, wretchedness, or despair? What concerns me here are broken words; not that which is simply recalcitrant to representation but rather that which is 'revealed' by and through languages' falling short; when in the telling we recognise that there is nothing there for us to recognise and when what is communicated is the failure of communication. It is such interruptions of comprehension which lead to the suggestion that there are modalities and aspects of affective experience that cannot be brought into the systemisation, thematisation, and conceptualisation that defines the work of social analysis. In many ways this is not a large or novel claim, or at least not initially, it is simply to suggest that there is something about many experiences undergone, and in particular, though not always or exclusively, those of sorrow, suffering, and affliction, which present a hermeneutic enigma or mystery to the analytic gaze and which, in eluding recollection, representation, and conceptualisation, trouble—or perhaps should trouble—attempts to determine and specify meaning. However, although this commentary on the phenomenological particularity of affliction and suffering may not consist of a grand initial claim I shall argue that it has many consequences for understanding the ethical imperatives which social science inherits and under the surveillance of which it operates, for the argument will be that, even as these 'events' elude the presence of representation, the grasp of comprehension and the fullness of narrative meaning, it is this very falling short which puts and keeps all of these movements and gestures of analysis in play. Thus the argument will be that this irreducible nonthematisability—the nonrelational—traces the limits and possibility of social analysis, being both its concealed destination and its immemorial origin.

[1] Such, it seems to me, is the key lesson to be drawn from the broad direction of the work 'after' actor-network theory; work which has sought to both multiply and specify ways of thinking the being-of or being-in relation against the grain of the former somewhat monodimensional accounts of 'classic' actor-network theory (see, for example, Callon and Law, 2003; Law, 1999; 2000; Law and Singleton, 2002; Lee and Brown, 1994; Lee and Stenner, 1999; Strathern, 1996).

How then could we forget the nonrelational? Why does absence seem so very absent from the prospective 'relational turn' for, as Gasché continues, the "very concept of relationality carries with it a reference to the nonrelational" (1999, page 9)? It seems to me that in the proliferation of biophilosophy, the unstoppable materialisation of actor networks and constructivist totalisations of the social or the cultural, few have been asking about breaks and gaps, interruptions and intervals, caesuras and tears (but see Dewsbury, 2003; Harrison, 2002; forthcoming; Hyams, 2004; Popke, 2003; Rose, 1997a; 1997b; Thrift, 1997). Not for a moment would I want to argue against the burgeoning 'gay science' of nonrepresentational 'theory' and the affirmations of summoning life (Dewsbury et al, 2002; Thrift, 2004; Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000), nor do I want to sound as though I disagree with an ethics of affect, with the desire to connect and a 'fidelity to the event' (McCormack, 2003). Far from it, for how in all good faith could one argue against such prayers and promises, how could one not seek—and at the same time understand the necessity of—the taking up of a hopeful and affirmative disposition toward the future (Anderson, 2004)? And yet I wonder in all of this where the concern is—and care—for distance, withdrawal, and disappearance, for, as I understand it, a gay science is inseparable, and only gains sense and significance from a context of tragedy, from the instant of the "loneliest loneliness" and the trial of the "heaviest burden" (Nietzsche, 1974, section 341).[2] A yes, a promise, or a prayer, a will, a desire, or a fidelity, indeed the taking-up of a stance or disposition, all of these affirm and accede to just as they are held out into and reach out across an uncertain distance, an interval or spacing, one to the other. Although I would not doubt for a second that relations are prior to their terms (Deleuze, 1991), that, as Dillon (2000) has written, what is radical about radical relationality is its anteriority to any identity, I would suggest that the somewhat counterintuitive result of this thought is not so much (or not only) another 'decentring of the subject', the dissolving of our selves and responsibilities into so many flickering networks, or the ecstatic evacuation of ipseity along lines of flight but rather (or also) a rebounding intensification of severance and responsibility. Although the positing of the anteriority of radical relationality ensures that the cornerstone of any identity is always in process, contingent and open, in the instant that this is affirmed one also affirms the nonrelational; one affirms that which uncannily "resists being drawn into and subsumed by relation" (Dillon, 2000, page 5); one affirms the opening of the open itself as both the impossibility and the chance of relationality. Hence the nonrelational as that which already "transits all relationality as a disruptive movement that prevents the full realization or final closure of relationality" (Dillon, 2000, page 5); in the very relating of the relational—at the 'heart' of relationality as it were—abides the absence of the nonrelational as that which silently called for, provoked, and continues to disturb and set in motion the relational. In this way I believe that any shift to a 'relational ontology'—if there can actually be such a thing—must not

[2] Gilles Deleuze's influential 'affirmation of the multiple' (1990), for example, is for me inseparable from his stoicism and *amor fati* (love of fate), both of which place the affirmation not within a world overflowing with meaning but emerging from and in the face of the disaster of meaninglessness. The love of fate and the wish to be 'worthy of events' in particular, it seems to me, can only occur as a commitment or decision and so as a disposition of the promise, with all that this entails (see Derrida, 1987; 1995a; 2002). A disposition which ultimately runs counter to Deleuze's more prominent—in geography at least—reading of Spinoza and the latter's *conatus essendi*. There is not room here nor is this paper the place for this discussion—though a few comments below do go in this direction—which would have to take in a critique of 'immanentism' and the role of fate and hope as well as raising questions over the compatibility or otherwise of ethics with an ontology of power; suffice to say that this paper is in some ways an attempt to think 'good' relationality otherwise than in terms of 'health' and the maximisation of my powers and the persistence—however becoming and differential—of my being (see Deleuze, 1986, page 190; 1988, page 102).

simply be describing a will to connect and thereby tie our fidelity to an irresponsible and unconsidered will to power, but rather must have as its acknowledged occasion the incessant proximity of the nonrelational. Hence the nonrelational not as that which is simply a bit further 'over there' or that which is 'not yet' in relation or the 'against which' of an opposing power but rather—and before and beyond all these distributions—a negativity which must not and cannot be sublated into any immanence. The nonrelational is that which offers no purchase, which eludes in a passivity which if it may be said to resist at all has the inert resistance of a weakness beyond or outside power, like a "blank cry" the harkening of which "alone parts our lips" and which causes our "answer to fall short of any possible match, so that this very failure gives us speech" (Chrétien, 2004, page 6). Indeed for Dillon it is this insistent, oblique, disquieting, and distinctly aporetic relation to the nonrelational, this being 'held-toward-another' as being held-toward that which 'resists being drawn into and subsumed by relation' which constitutes the ethical moment or claim of poststructural thought (Dillon, 2000). This being held-toward and so within the thrall of that which "defies anticipation, reappropriation, calculation—any form of predetermination" (Derrida, in Derrida and Ferraris, 2001, page 21) which gives thought its invisible inspiration and its impulse; an enigmatic "involvement with the Other, and not an illumination or a totalization" (Libertson, 1982, page 27). Here speech, thought, and theory, indeed consciousness itself—if such a thing may be defined—are understood as fundamentally responsive in nature, as coming to themselves as always already addressed, always already underway in responding—however inadequately and impossibly—to the contentless call of the nonrelational. In section 3 of the paper I outline this moment or movement of being called in more detail through an account of the call and response structure of nonintentional affectivity.

The aporetic demands of the nonrelational place a particular strain upon the traditional epistemological assumptions and resources of social analysis in that they highlight the peculiar and very particular structure of testimony and witness. In the concluding section of the paper I consider the status of testimony and witness after the failure of correspondence, considering testimony where words are found to be wanting, when they fail to deliver or deliver nothing or, at least, nothing communicable or representable. The point here is *not* that words or language are in some way a fall from the putative unity of 'primordial experiences', an experience which could be represented if only we had the 'right words' or terms, nor is it a simple celebration of language unmoored, but rather that in each instant we find ourselves caught in a double bind where reference, that is to say some type of correspondence, one-to-the-other, is both necessary and, at the same time, will always fall short. Drawing together the themes of the paper, in this section I offer a comment on the interval between us, on the spacing of what we all too easily call 'intersubjectivity', and on the nonrepresentable and unspeakable 'foundation' of the speakable, storyable, narratable, or thematisable; on the unavoidable obligations of relating the nonrelational.

2 Impasse

Suffering is language destroying.

Suddenly or over time pain, loss, and affliction tend toward the erosion and depletion of the capacity for speech and communication, toward the unravelling of our words and sentences into stutters and inchoate cries, into moans, and into the catatonia of silence. Such at least is the central claim of Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (1985) wherein with great insight and compassion Scarry describes how the progress of pain through the body brings about an unmaking of the self and the world, a stripping away or lessening of the layers of consciousness, cultivation, and civilisation which

compose both. For Scarry there is a moment of suffering outside these structures and resources, a moment beyond all forbearance or endurance towards which all experiences of suffering tend and in which there is a "reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (Scarry, 1985, page 25).[3] Scarry writes that pain or suffering is almost unique in human experience in this respect in that it is not an intentional state, is "not *of* or *for* anything" (1985, page 5), and as such resists objectification in language or imagination, slipping away from our attempts to bring it to mind, represent, and tell of it. Certainly one can suffer from love or hate, anger or fear, insofar as one can or must endure them; however, the suffering of suffering unworks the ordering of such structures of intention and meaning; suffering defines the inert compulsion which lies within the webs of any such affective relations. That other affective or emotional states bear the trace of suffering should come as no surprise given the mixed etymologies and meanings of the terms affect, suffering, emotion, and passion, all of which describe—to varying degrees—a displacement or a forced movement of the body and self rather than a movement by will.[4] However, in its lack of phenomenological content or object and in its way of withdrawal from and negation of the will, suffering describes the decay or the unworking of such affective relations. Unlike that which is suffered—which is always *of* or *for* and which as such always contains a residue of the projection and sense bestowal of intention, no matter how obsessive or erratic this may be—suffering itself takes place as the dissolution of intention, as an "extreme passivity, helplessness, abandonment and solitude" (Levinas, 1998, page 93). In this way suffering cannot be said to relate or project; it discloses nothing, it apprehends nothing, it gives nothing. No matter how explosive, suffering is irredeemably abandoned to senselessness and the absurd gravity of an in-itself.[5]

Levinas describes the nature of suffering in a remarkably similar manner to Scarry. He comments that suffering is "of course, a *datum* in consciousness ... similar to the lived experience of color, sound, contact or any other sensation", however—and like Scarry—he continues that "in this very 'content' it is an in-spite-of-consciousness, the unassumable" (Levinas, 1998, page 91, original emphasis). Thus Levinas suggests that insofar as suffering constitutes a 'datum' for consciousness it is a paradoxical one, one which describes the rejection and break up of consciousness and life as the very system of apprehensions which would grasp and comprehend it. Although suffering can be, must be, and is endured—lived with, controlled, and managed in all kinds of ways—it is always threatening to "lose this measure", indeed it is "of its essence to be always already beyond measure. Suffering is suffering when one can no longer suffer it" (Blanchot, 1993, page 44). Suffering is always on the verge of worsening, always threatening to pass beyond consolation or endurance. Suffering does not have a limit; like an event which does not concern you it continues regardless of the point where you can no longer go on.

[3] For good reasons in her text Scarry is predominantly concerned with what we could refer to as 'physical' pain whereas here (and throughout this paper) I choose not to make any clear separation between 'physical' and 'psychological' suffering. As Tudor writes: "The distinction *is* to be made, but it is best made on particular occasions ... rather than at the beginning of 'inquiries into suffering' " (2001, page 27, original emphasis).

[4] Affect as to produce an effect upon or to influence, suffering as to bear or to undergo, emotion as to move out or remove, and passion as suffering, enduring, being acted upon.

[5] This is one of the reasons why Levinas (1998) describes suffering as 'woe' or 'evil' insofar as it describes the taking place of an extreme abandonment. It is in this sense that suffering is often experienced as a damnation—see footnote (6). As we shall see this imagery should not—in this context—be read as a form of theodicy or as a surreptitious argument for the redemptive powers of suffering but rather as an attempt to describe a phenomenological event which goes to the boundaries of the phenomenological.

In this way experiences of suffering are quasicontradictory experiences in that they tend towards the limits of experience, towards the unexperienceable and irrecuperable. As a lessening or undoing suffering dispossesses the self of itself, of its having been and its futurity, stripping it of its reserves of potential and its hidden dimensions, condemning what remains to a present in which "the bare fact of presence is oppressive" (Levinas, 1978, page 65). Any analysis of suffering must encounter this traumatic ruin of or transport beyond communicability, this mortal movement towards the loss of distances, perspectives, and orientations and the "contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or ... the body swelling to fill the entire universe" (Scarry, 1985, page 35). A never-ending instant in which past and future flee into themselves and the ecstatic structure of the world breaks apart leaving in its wake a here and now emptied of depth, meaning, and potential. A here and now divested of the possibility of relation, refuge, or dwelling. As these structures recede what is revealed is not another possibility for the self, another becoming, but rather the extreme exposure and abandonment of the self. Suffering is not contained by or within the expansive, assimilative proliferation of vital life nor is it redeemable within the ecstatic structures of being-in-the-world, to which it stands as a tear and a termination. Equally, and for all its particular modulations and inflections, the passage of suffering describes the thanatocratic limit of the 'social' and the 'cultural'. As Dastur (1996, see also Derrida, 1993a; 1995a) notes, there is no culture which is not in some way a culture of mourning and death and which is not nearest its origins and limits in the care of and preparation for death. Suffering is not a sensible or affectual capacity, a degree of freedom, a power, or an escape route and nor, as the very rending of the most intimate folds of the social, can suffering be reduced to a cultural or social expression. Rather suffering is a movement of katabolism within the all-too-human course of living – dying, the "against oneself which is in oneself" (Levinas, 1991, page 51) from the beginning.[6] Intransitive, irreducible, and inert, suffering is a disaster (Blanchot, 1995; Caputo, 1993). Insofar as it may be said to appear at all it is as the ruin of appearance, insofar as it may be said to reveal anything at all it reveals the extreme vulnerability and passivity of finite corporeal existence. In these ways suffering does not have an essence. A negation which cannot be mobilised or recuperated, suffering is ultimately "useless; for nothing" (Levinas, 1998, page 93).

The claim that suffering is intrinsically meaningless and irredeemable is undoubtedly a disconcerting one and one which is ripe for misunderstanding and abuse; however, and following Levinas, I want to insist on its unavoidability. On one level this is a simple—if somewhat hyperbolic—claim or demand that suffering not be justified or be allowed to become justifiable. To claim that suffering is 'useless' or 'for nothing' in this sense is a rejection of theodicy in its religious as much as its social, political, and intellectual versions; a rejection of justifications for the 'uses' of suffering in, as Scarry puts it, "the translation of the singularity of another's suffering into ideology" (1985, page 143). This claim runs parallel to Jean-Luc Nancy's (1991) account of the assimilation of the uncanny nature of passion, suffering, and death as the necessary and constitutive repressive move in the foundation and formation of any self-closing or identifiable community, insofar as it is the bestowal and investment of

[6] Katabolism; destructive metabolism, the breakdown of complex molecules into their more simple components, from *kata* (Latin)—to cast down or crush (as also in catatonic). From D H Lawrence's "The Hands of God" (1952, page 60): "That awful and sickening endless sinking, sinking through the slow, corruptive levels of disintegrative knowledge when the self has fallen from the hands of God and sinks, seething and sinking, corrupt and sinking still, in depth after depth of disintegrative consciousness, sinking in the endless undoing, the awful katabolism into the abyss".

meaning upon suffering and death which recuperates suffering, and death into an immanence *to* or *for* the community (see also Bataille, 1985; 1991; Dastur, 1996; Muecke, 1999).[7] Thus on one level positing of the 'uselessness' of suffering is an attempt to undermine its utilisation and economisation within certain metaphysical narratives or myths and to expose the violences contained therein; to refuse either through the work of eulogy, narrative, or explanation the conversion of tragedy into romance. However, the claim does not come to an end on this point of critique.

In its irreducible nonthemetisability, that is to say in its singularity and unexchangeability, suffering poses a particular problem not only for critique but for social analysis per se. As we shall see, understood as a positive, interpretative, and systematic thought social analysis stands in an unavoidably aporetic relationship with the silence of suffering and the vulnerability and finitude to which it bears witness. On the one hand, and before its constitution as such, social analysis finds itself already responding, finds itself already in a going toward or in a search for the other who remains far away. This search or inclination describes, I believe, an irreducible sincerity in social analysis as both an obsession with and promise to the other, a commitment which is inscribed within the very practice of social analysis. However, and on the other hand, social analysis constitutes itself as such, as a positive, analytic, and interpretive science, within and through the limitation or cessation of this going-toward; enacting it as a desire to bring the social to light and thus as a desire to be done with the social insofar as it submits sociality to the terminations and operations of representation and knowledge—be it by the finality of certainty or the pragmatism of strategy. Such is the inevitably violent negation or effacement at the origin of social analysis and indeed of critique; the sacrificial logic in and by which social analysis and critique found themselves as such. We—as practising social scientists—are more or less bound to a language of mastery, a mastery which is the trait of social analysis as a work of thematisation, systemisation, representation, conceptualisation, and comprehension, and by which knowledge qua ontology finds itself perpetually in conflict with the responsive journeying or going toward the other in their alterity.

So to the impasse which gives this section its title, an impasse within which social analysis does and must demur. The act of an imaginative response to suffering is an imperative; however, how in this act are we to avoid effacing the very one we seek to recognise or the very event we seek to relate? How are we to avoid committing an all-too-principled or an all-too-justifiable sacrifice of singularity? As Perrin asks:

> "How can one speak for the other without effacing his or her otherness, without silencing his or her silence in a speech that would *take* the other's place and in which, therefore, it would be as if the other had not been silenced at all?" (2004, page 138, original emphasis).

As social analysis approaches the other it perpetually substitutes the fragility and obduracy of the other's passion and suffering, recuperating and appropriating it through a series of analytic and interpretive reductions into an avatar for something else. Indeed this appropriation is of the very nature of social analysis insofar as it operates by necessity with and within a concept of 'the social', 'the cultural', 'ideology', 'identity', or 'the everyday' and their associated regimes and modalities of explanation. Social analysis

[7] Nancy is not simply dismissing people who have died in struggle but rather the religious, political, and intellectual teleology which would seek to manage and profit from such events: "Millions of deaths, of course, are *justified* by the revolt of those who die: they are justified as a rejoinder to the intolerable, as insurrections against social, political, technical, military, religious oppression. But these deaths are not *sublated*: no dialectic, no salvation leads these deaths to any other immanence that that of... death (cessation, or decomposition, which forms only the parody or reverse of immanence)" (Nancy, 1991, page 13, emphasis and ellipses in original).

cannot but translate suffering and thereby put it to use, making it into an example or a case of something else. As well as—or rather *as much as*—being a process of bringing to light, knowledge creation, a commitment to representation, meaning, critique, and perhaps even the communication of reality or giving a voice to the voiceless, social analysis may also be defined in its specificity as a particular way of effacing events (see Derrida, 1995b).

How shall I say it… ? in response to a question in an interview perhaps. A brief silence or sob and then according to the logic of interviews something *must* be said, some data given, a secret confessed, or a belief made public. Through the transcription machines, coding programmes, and conceptual schema of social analysis even such a stuttering to silence all too readily becomes a plenitude of information:

> "The individual who is subjected to the institutional imperative to say what he [sic] sees… must formulate his living insights and experiences in the established concepts of the language—in forms that are not his own, but are the forms of anyone. His most intimate and living impulses lose their individuality in being formulated… .When he speaks, he speaks as one in whose statement the logic, theories and cognitive methods of his culture are implicated; he speaks as a representative, equivalent and interchangeable with another, of established truth" (Lingis, 1994, page 38).

The analyst cannot but be provoked by a lack of disclosure, social analysis abhors a vacuum and so it inserts itself into the very tearing of the social as a repairing or recovery of its putative meaning and logic. Social analysis as a putting an end to stammering, fixing it through the installation of a metalanguage or supercontext, relational or otherwise. However, we cannot but be disturbed and disquieted by the suspicion that this secret may have no secret; that this silence may reveal and tell of nothing, or at least nothing that we could ever be sure of, nothing we could ever recover and make present (see Derrida, 1979, page 133). As when after months of interviewing and analysis Rose momentarily abandons her "interpretive project, with its transcripts, codes, categories, records and papers"—"maybe I just got tired"—and wonders "what if it wasn't the meaning I thought the interviewees were making that was important" (1997a, page 184).

3 Passivity

To begin this section I want to restate the impasse just outlined. How, on the one hand, are we to understand the occasion of the failure or lack of communication and correspondence otherwise than as an error to be corrected or a lack to be filled, as such a response can only take shape insofar as it overwrites and effaces that to which it responds? And yet, and on the other hand, how are we to avoid becoming paralysed by this irreducible nonthematisability, by this absence of signification and the noncoincidence of intention and its putative object, and so in staying silent fail to respond again? Although to explain may be to efface, such that one can understand how there may be 'good reasons' for not responding, one "cannot, one ought not to respond with nothing" (Derrida, 1995c, page 20). In this section of the paper I am concerned with the status of the response, with the type of responsibility which is invoked when one talks of, as we did in the introduction, this 'being held-toward' that which 'resists being drawn into and subsumed by relation', when one is held by that which resists comprehension and anticipation, and when one talks of an involvement with the other which is based upon neither knowledge nor recognition. For these reasons many of the questions in this section are over the status and nature of representation and in particular of representation thought of—in one way or another—as a form of correspondence, one to the other. If the previous section was

concerned with how the undergoing of suffering describes a movement toward the limits of the phenomenological then this section is concerned with the implications that this movement beyond, and so this ruin of, communicability, representation, and comprehension has for the status of the response. For in considering this status surely nothing could be *more* irresponsible than to suggest that comprehension is impossible, for without this moment of mastery how is any judgment to take place? Further, is it not the case that the very concept of the nonrelational threatens to undermine the status of commitment and mutual understanding and to offer little in their place but despair and solitude? As Derrida asks:

> "on the pretext of feeling incapable of responding *to* the other, and answering *for* oneself, does not one undermine, both theoretically and practically, the concept of responsibility, which is actually the very essence of the *socius*?" (1995c, page 21, original emphasis).

And so in suggesting that certain aspects of our affective life may remain in perpetuity outside the comprehension of social analysis and insisting on their refraction of interpretation and irreducibility to theory, one may be indulging in little more than a 'pornography of horror' (Bernstein, 2004). These are serious questions and what follows in this and the next section cannot promise to answer all the concerns they raise, however the hope is that an indication will be given of why they are misplaced and the possibility for a series of further questions may be given.

In a recent paper in this journal Castree and Macmillan (2004) commented that talk of the 'failure of representation' is hardly new or particularly revolutionary news. Castree and Macmillan are right of course: critiques of representation as 'correspondence with reality' are as old as the concept of reality itself. In this spirit Castree and Macmillan aver that representation, at least as conceived in broadly positivist or realist terms, has always already failed; that representation is "constitutively inadequate" in such terms insofar as any actual representation is always "*strategic* and *selective*, even when they pretend not to be" (Castree and Macmillan, 2004, page 476, original emphasis). So far so uncontroversial; however, I do wonder if Castree and Macmillan's comments are not somewhat disingenuous given their contextualisation within a discussion of so-called nonrepresentational theory. It has always seemed to me that one of the points of nonrepresentational theory is *not* simply or solely the antirealist claim that any representation has 'always already failed' but rather—and if I can put it this way—that such acts were never meant to 'succeed'. Despite the antihumanist insights of various structuralisms and poststructuralisms there remains a deeply ingrained presumption in social and cultural analysis that acts of representation are first and foremost acts of 'power'. Whether representation is understood primarily as an act of consciousness or as a social phenomenon—that is, as the outcome of the synthesis of apperception or an institutional or discursive formation—representation is generally taken to exist as a possibility only for *one* who or that which *can* and *does* act. This understanding places representation under the jurisdiction of an intentional subject, whose desires, interests, and situation it—the representation—is undertaken to express, hence the claim that any representation is 'strategic and selective, even when they pretend not to be'. In these terms communication is understood as the "transmission of meaningful thought contents [conscious or not] between interlocutors" (Dudiak, 2001, page 3). The 'failure of representation' herein is ultimately attributed to an unavoidable but frustrating divergence or muddying of contexts between actors, 'good' or 'successful' representations being ones which work towards the manifestation of their meaning so that they can be comprehended by or may persuade others. In their paper, Castree and Macmillan more or less maintain this metaphysical model of representation; although claiming that a representational project which has veracity

as its ultimate goal is at best naive they remain wedded to the idea of 'successful' representations as intentional strategic acts which manage to convince or persuade; representations through which the actor is able to inspire and produce conviction and fusion.[8] The problem with such an understanding is its heroic valorisation of the position of the speaker over and above that of those being addressed as well as that of the speaker himself or herself as an addressee.[9] Indeed, although Castree and Macmillan indicate having been addressed by a number of nonpresent others (that is, casein, foetuses, future generations, the subaltern), the status and implications of such an address—the openness and susceptibility to and the event of being subject to it—are never considered as such. It seems to me that in this elision many of the implications of nonrepresentational theory and posthumanist thought are bypassed. Equally, although by their antirealist critique of representation Castree and Macmillan must note that "representations are not [...] about letting the oppressed, othered, or invisible (delete as appropriate) 'speak for themselves'", they maintain that "The left, then, has little choice: use the resources of representation to make the subaltern heard (human or otherwise), however imperfectly and impossibly" (2004, page 476), and yet no space is given to fleshing out either the status of or the surely considerable implications for theory, intention, strategy, and action of this 'imperfectability and impossibility' or the manner of relation of one to another it implies. For these reasons one must wonder quite what is being chosen here in this 'little choice' other than an affirmation of the freedom and ability to choose. Without any consideration of representation, communication, and correspondence otherwise than as acts of intentional and deliberative polemical power and without the acknowledgement of the priority and exteriority of the addressor and the prior inclination toward an addressee—that is to say, of the disquieting obligations of 'being-held-toward' that which 'resists being drawn into and subsumed by relation'—everything begins and ends with the strength of will and volition of a "speaking subject, a subject that speaks, and that causes to do" (Lyotard, in Lyotard and Thébaud, 1985, page 37), and thus runs the risk of becoming at worst an irresponsible sophism or at best a somewhat nihilistic realpolitik. I do not for a second doubt Castree and Macmillan's good intentions or their commitment to the causes about which they write, however it seems to me that they do not offer a convincing account of the interval between representation and alterity or a way to think through this interval. For these reasons a heroic-volitional subjectivity returns

[8] Hence the case study in the paper which—if I have understood it correctly—is a teleologically constructed story of a series of 'successful' or 'winning' moves within a specific language game. The message seems to be about postmodern realpolitik; that social scientists working after the 'failure' of absolute referents should adopt the 'best' strategy to 'win' strategic positions within language games by whatever rhetorical means seem appropriate or necessary. Hence the final line of the case study; "but it [the case study] illustrates how even the most straightforward of representational strategies can have actual political implications that academics armed with nonrepresentational theory might find it hard to match" (Castree and Macmillan, 2004, page 479). And yet that a theory does or does not have 'actual political implications' seems a somewhat loose if not arbitrary way to judge its worth. Within what parameters is such a judgment to be made, for example? Is one to judge once and for all? Now and not again? And how is a theory which questions the nature of the 'political' presumed herein to be judged? Equally Castree and Macmillan's claim that 'we' should suspend 'our' knowledge that representation has always already 'failed' within such situations opens up a host of questions; are we to try and forget this knowledge once and for all? Are we to forget selectively, strategically perhaps? But when? At this very moment, for example? And what guides *this* strategy? And finally—for now—what would it mean to try to delay *these* questions with reference to a lack of time or an urgency as implied, for example, in the line beginning "The left, then, has little choice" (Castree and Macmillan, 2004, page 476), which comes toward the end of their paper?

[9] I am indebted to Stuart Elden's (2005, chapter 1) discussion of political rhetoric for this point.

to bridge the gap, sweeping questions of the limits of representation and of alterity away in favour of decisive and straightforward rhetorical force. Having said all of this, I agree wholeheartedly when they note that there is an 'ineluctability' to representation (Castree and Macmillan, 2004, pages 470, 474, 477); indeed, such is representation's ineluctable nature that I do not think that there is *any* choice over whether or not to 'make use of its resources'. And it is here in the paradoxical mixture of an imperative to represent and the impossibility of achieving precisely this that I think Castree and Macmillan touch on another understanding of the relation between representation and alterity, one which I wish to try and outline in the remainder of this section.

Representation does not wait for our consent or denial to get underway; rather we find ourselves always already within patterns and regimes of truth as the very resources which allow us to agree or disagree. We come to ourselves already entwined in the unfolding historicity of many such regimes such that our intentions are always already outside themselves and our desires, actions, and words will never have been quite our own. To a large extent the major insights of poststructuralism within social science have concerned this realisation, seeking to chart how human subjectivity is dependent upon and formed through and across multiple structures which precede its appearance and so condition its freedom and choice. Hence in a recent article Butler comments that every "narrative begins *in media res*, when many things have already taken place to make me and my story possible", and as such any narrative—and by extension any explanation or theory—is "haunted by that for which I have no definitive story", by that "for which I can give no account" (Butler, 2001, page 27). However, Butler insists that this opacity—this *lapsus* or ellipsis of and in representation—with regard to its origin is not and cannot be explained away or resolved by recourse to the 'historical a priori' of genealogy or by social, cultural, or materialist variants thereof. Although in no way denying the importance of such investigations—quite the opposite in fact—Butler maintains that, even through multiple narrativisations, recapitulations, and interpretations, ambiguities and shadows will remain for both me and for my interlocutors. As Chalier writes, "The history of every creature stands in relation to that anteriority or that absence, it bears witness to them, in spite of itself and often unbeknownst to itself" (Chalier, 2002, page 119). Butler's claim here should *not* be mistaken for a simple reassertion of antirealism, rather she is attempting to show how "if I give an account, and give it to you, then my narrative depends upon a structure of address" (Butler, 2001, page 32). Certainly any account must make use of a language which is not and could not be one's own and which comes freighted with meanings beyond one's choice and control and to which one is subject; however, and cutting through these contexts, Butler is seeking to highlight the situation of the self as an *addressee*; as one who has been interpolated, one who has been called and who is already responding. The comment by Chalier given above also intimates as much, insofar as it emphasises the *act* of bearing witness to an enigma beyond the actual content of that witness. Dealing with similar concerns, Derrida (1998) highlights this situation in his analysis of the contradictory speech act "I only have one language, yet it is not mine"; the act of one who is, as Lyotard puts it, already in "a hold that is an obligation", a hold "that puts me into movement" (in Lyotard and Thébaud, 1985, page 38).

We should be careful how we treat this concept of 'structure of address' as it should *not* be taken to be invoking a dialogical framework or situation, nor can it be clearly situated within any ontic or ontological determination. Rather, and after Derrida and Levinas, the term is being used to describe the quasi-transcendental condition of possibility of any narrative, discourse, or ontology, and indeed of the possibility that such things could ever be said in my name. The 'structure of address'

is quasi-transcendental insofar as one cannot get out of it to take up a position of overview and neither can one gain autonomy from within, as no speaker, "no maker of statements, no utterer, is ever autonomous. On the contrary, an utterer is always someone who is first of all addressed" (Lyotard in Lyotard and Thébaud, 1985, page 31). Thus the 'structure of address' invoked by Butler does not presuppose copresence, mutual recognition (or mutual misrecognition), identification, or any straightforward operation of transference, nor does it presuppose anything that could be called a 'shared' or 'mutual' understanding or a 'common ground', be this posited to operate consciously, unconsciously, or somatically. Rather, and following Levinas, Butler is seeking to describe an asymmetric and diachronic call and response structure, a "relation without relation or without relation other than to the incommensurable" (Blanchot, 1988, page 25), or, as she puts it:

> "the 'I' which I am is nothing without this 'you', and cannot even begin to refer to itself outside the relation to the Other by which its capacity for self-reference emerges. I am mired, given over. Even the word 'dependency' cannot do the job here. And what this means is that I am also formed in ways that precede and enable my self-forming and that this particular kind of transitivity is difficult, if not impossible, to narrate" (2001, page 37).

The call-and-response configuration of the 'structure of address' indicates that alterity is too close for comfort, that the other is closer to me than I am to myself, for in the situation described by Butler in the quote above one does not intuit, understand, or comprehend the call and *then* respond; rather the call has already set the subject in motion *before* any such reflection and introspection (see Libertson, 1982, page 20). Hence Butler's aversion to the term 'dependency', as it would presuppose a subject position prior to the movement of being obligated. What is being described here is a radical susceptibility or *passivity* of subjectivity; an extreme passivity from which the subject is set in motion and set in motion as obliged and responsible prior to any choice or freedom on its part. The subject herein is obligated before it comprehends in a way which questions the autonomy of both its will and reason. The concept of passivity at use here is drawn primarily from the work of Levinas, wherein he develops it principally to break with the priority accorded to intentional consciousness within phenomenology and to value placed upon autonomy within wider thought of the social and political and the determination of the ethical. Levinas stresses repeatedly that the passivity of the subject with which he is concerned is *not* to be thought of as passivity "which *counters* activity with its inertia", as such an understanding "presupposes that of activity" (1987, page 136, original emphasis) and thereby makes passivity into an option for a prior subject. Rather passivity for Levinas indicates a primary impressionability or vulnerability, a "preoriginal affection by another" (2000, page 162), before any choice could become possible. Here Levinas is attempting to free receptiveness and sensibility from their determination as a set of immanent capabilities or as primarily intuitive and comprehending, for understood thus receptiveness and sensibility are already determined as powers and works of identification and recognition and thus as cognitive acts (see Lingis, 1991, page xx). Contrary to those who would make embodiment a second mind by treating sensation primarily as a function of sensible intuition and so turn it into an 'immanence to...', the concept of passivity is a means for describing the anarchical "insubordination of affect and sensibility" (Chalier, 2002, page 125). Passivity describes a 'nonintentional affectivity' which is prior to any posited prereflexive consciousness insofar as the latter is still a 'consciousness of ...'; passivity indicates a radical openness and exposure to alterity in a "modality of relation between oneself and the other instituted prior to the constituting consciousness" (Drabinski, 2001, page 83). Indeed, as Levinas writes,

"The passivity of the exposure responds to an assignation that identifies me as the unique one, not by reducing me to myself, but by stripping me of every identical quiddity, and thus of all form, all investure, which would slip into the assignation" (1991, page 49).

Such that despite oneself "passivity signifies, becomes signifyingness, exposure in response to..." (Levinas, 1991, page 49, ellipsis in original).

What does passivity signify? It is important to remember that what is being described here is an immemorial relation. Asymmetric and diachronic, it comes to pass in a 'lost time', in a past which was never present. In this 'deep time' before the subject alterity is understood to have participated in the very movement of closure of interiority, indeed the movement of closure of interiority—the awakening of subjectivity—comes to itself through and as the withdrawal of alterity (a withdrawal which is also its approach), as if interiority were the trace of alterity and the separation of subjectivity—the irreducibility or election of the 'I' beyond any 'quiddity', the radical noncoincidence of self and other—were not an ontological solitude of the self but the very event of intersubjectivity. Far from being the despair of solitude this is the interval which makes compassion, friendship, and love possible; an event from which every 'for-itself' turns out to have been a 'to-the-other'. As Chrétien writes,

"Prior to all of the answers that may or may not be eventually given, prior to the responses that engage responsibility and involve an actually constituted power of response, there is the response that we ourselves are, simply through the fact of our being" (2004, page 18).

The radical openness of passivity does not yield to recollection; never having been present one can neither forget nor remember it, neither repress nor represent it, neither speak of it nor not speak of it. This is the secret of the anteriority of radical relationality; the call, the nonrepresentational, the nonrelational; "The secret [which] never allows itself to be captured or covered over by the relation to the other, by being-with or by any form of 'social-bond'" (Derrida, 1995c, page 30). A sign which does not signal, which "reveals and hides nothing" and within which an "irreversible lapse is sealed" (Levinas, 1996, page 62). The secret, perhaps, of a *sociality without condition*, of an anarchical or proximal sociality which has always already interrupted the continuity of representation and which is not itself founded by or in any illumination, manifestation, or comprehension and which is not mediated by intention, representation, or cognition and which is, thus, otherwise than knowledge. What, then, does passivity signify?

"The passivity of the 'for another' expresses a sense in it in which no reference, positive or negative, to a prior will enters. It is the living human corporeality, as a possibility of pain, a sensibility which itself is the susceptibility to being hurt, a self uncovered, exposed" (Levinas, 1991, page 51).

To return to the impasse with which we began; how are we to understand the apparent failure or lack of communication and correspondence otherwise than a contingent error while, at the same time, not allowing analysis to become paralysed? Perhaps it comes down to how we hear or hearken to the failure of representation and how we let this resound through our theories and accounts. I noted above that, for me, one of the points of nonrepresentational theory was not just the claim that representation has always already 'failed' but equally that it was never meant to 'succeed'. Indeed, as Blanchot (1995, page 12) notes, to celebrate the failure of representation is to remain in awe of its putative successes. Again following Blanchot, I would maintain that if we are to understand the insufficiency of representation as *constitutive* we should not understand it in terms "derived from a model of sufficiency" (1988, page 8). Rather, I would suggest that we would do better to think of this constitutive inadequacy not

in terms of failure but rather as *falling short*—as derived from 'ellipsis' meaning an omission of a word or words in a sentence, from the Latin *ellīpsis* and the Greek *éllepesis*, a falling short. These three points of suspension which punctuate a text and interrupt articulate discourses; three dots to mark a resistance to translation, to entering into a correspondence. Three dots to trace the nonrepresentational as the nonrelational, as that which, if it may be said to appear at all, appears as the fragmentation or ruin of appearance, as a hole in the world, as a "blindness that reveals the very truth of the eyes" (Derrida, 1993b, page 127) and which if it may be said to take place at all, takes place as a being 'held-toward-another', as being held-toward that which 'resists being drawn into and subsumed by relation'. Three dots then to mark the analytic "gaze veiled by tears" (Derrida, 1993b, page 127); *How shall I say it ... ?*

This falling short is not something which befalls representation rather, as constitutive, it is what representation is before it is anything else; before it is a correspondence, a being adequate, a synthesis, or a thematisation, before it is power even. In incessantly falling short representation shows itself to be first and foremost a weakness, "an impossibility of keeping silent", as a scandal of intention, autonomy, and mastery; as the tracing of an intervallic sociality without condition and as a "witnessing that does not presuppose an experience" (Levinas, 2000, page 192). As representation which has fallen short bears witness to that which it cannot contain, it bears an "unconditionality [which] is independent of every determinate context, even of determination of context in general", an unconditionality which, however, "announces itself as such only in the *opening* of context" (Derrida, 1988, page 152, original emphasis); an unconditionality which can only 'announce' itself in and as falling short. Here then, at the heart of the visible the invisible, at the heart of the response the call, and at the heart of representation and relationality the nonrepresentational and the nonrelational. As Chrétien writes:

> "no response will ever correspond. The perfection of the answer will lie forever in its deficiency, since what calls us in the call is from the start the very lack of measure, its incommensurability [...] The call alone makes ours, irresistibly ours, the impossibility of responding, of corresponding to it, as the very resource needed for responding" (2004, page 23).

Or, as Derrida puts it,

> "Each time I open my mouth, each time I speak or write, I *promise*. Whether I like it or not: here, the fatal precipitation of the promise must be dissociated from the values of the will, intention, or meaning-to-say that are reasonably attached to it. The performative of this promise is not one speech act amongst others. It is implied by any other performative, and this promise heralds the uniqueness of a language to come [...] It is not possible to speak outside this promise that gives *a* language, the uniqueness of the idiom, but only by promising to give it [...] language is for the other, coming from the other, *the* coming of the other" (1998, pages 67–68, original emphasis).

4 Tears

To bring this paper to a close I want to offer a few comments on the status and logic of witnessing and testimony. These terms have been used throughout the paper and have already been a cause for comment above. Indeed in many ways in the paper I have been solely concerned with the status of testimony and with the status of one unfinished elliptical line in particular. Like this one fragment, here I want to show how it is of the nature of testimony to approach toward and withdraw from interpretation at the same time, and, as such, interpretation consists of the unfolding of a logic which is subject

to—has already been subject to—repeated interruption and suspension. These points of suspension are the very possibility of interpretation, although apparently discovered only later as stumbling (or writer's) blocks they in fact preoccupy any account for, as Derrida writes,

"When the discourse *holds* in some way, it is because it has been opened up on the basis of some traumatising event, by an upsetting question that doesn't let one rest, that no longer lets one sleep, and because it nevertheless resists the destruction begun by this traumatism" (1995b, page 381, original emphasis).

In his memoir *At the Mind's Limits* Jean Améry recounts his experience of being tortured by the Gestapo in July 1943 at the Belgium fortress of Breendonk. He describes being brought to the bunker, having his hands bound behind his back, and then being lifted by his bindings so that, after a few seconds of resistance, the balls of his shoulders leapt from their sockets.

"The pain was what it was. Beyond that there is nothing to say. Qualities of feeling are as incomparable as they are indescribable. They mark the limit of the capacity of language to communicate" (1980, page 33).

With these lines what Améry refers to as the 'objective description' of his experience is momentarily paused; he is telling us that he will not or, rather, that he cannot speak of something. Améry inscribes an incapacity to attest, an incapacity to communicate, at the heart of his account of being tortured. This incapacity is not his, he claims, but that of language. It is not that he lacks the right or the correct words but rather that there is nothing more that can be meaningfully said at this point. Yet, despite this failure, Améry did write. After some twenty-two years of not writing about his experiences during the Second World War, in 1965 he vigilantly essayed and documented the details, binding up his account within a network of accountable, publicly available references, dates and places, within a network of proof, the veracity of which is here undoubted. Beyond this, Améry's essay presents an analysis of and an argument for an irreducible link between torture and the Third Reich as well as reflections upon the inescapable nature of embodied vulnerability and its existential consequences. Indeed on one level he stitches his account together such that it almost becomes seamless, almost becomes an encapsulated narrative; a potentially successful 'working through', a successful communication and representation, and an accurate descriptive testimony. Yet here, at the centre of the account, in the instant where Améry's words promise, or perhaps threaten, to close over on themselves, there is a tear. At the heart of his account there is a suspension of correspondence, an inscription or an incision of incommunicability.

Why this awkward phrase, 'the veracity of which is here undoubted'? Because it is of the nature of testimony that its veracity be doubtable. Always given in the first person the logic of testimony presupposes the singularity of an individual's experience; however, and at the same time, the given testimony must be readable, recognisable, and translatable—in short, it must be iterable. Speaking the truth in my name means that my account must be both singular and universal, it must be mine but it must also be possible to be anyone's. As Derrida comments:

"When I commit myself to speaking the truth, I commit myself to repeating the same thing, an instant later, two instants later, and for eternity, in a certain way. But this repetition carries the instant outside itself" (2000, page 32).

It is perhaps worth recalling at this point some of the questions asked at the start of the previous section which concerned the potentially pernicious nature of the discussion being presented here, for it may seem as though the status of Améry's testimony is being undermined. However, the point I am seeking to make is not a simple assertion of the possibility of scepticism, for insofar as scepticism is thought

of as a threat to testimony it is because testimony is being thought exclusively in ontological terms. In such terms testimony is grasped primarily as information, as "reducible to the relationship that leads from an index to the indicated" to the exclusion of the fictional, the figural, and the literary (Levinas, 1991, page 151; see Derrida, 1988; 2000; 2002). However this reduction is really an attempt to turn testimony into evidence, whereas

> "Testimony, in the strict sense of the term, is advanced in the first person by someone who says, 'I swear', who pledges to tell the truth, gives his [sic] word, and asks to be taken at his word in a situation in which nothing has been proven—where nothing will be proven, for structural reasons, for reasons that are essential and not contingent. It is possible for testimony to be corroborated by evidence, but the process of evidence is absolutely heterogeneous to that of testimony, which implies faith, belief, sworn faith, the pledge to tell the truth [...] Consequently, where there is evidence, there is not testimony" (Derrida, in Derrida and Stiegler, 2002, pages 93–94).

And again, briefly, "When I pledge to speak the truth, I don't pledge to speak the true" (Derrida and Stiegler, 2002, page 98). If evidence and testimony are heterogeneous and the former is of the ontological then the claim of testimony is not ontological but ethical (Levinas, 1991, see Hatley, 2000).

> "The pain was what it was. Beyond that there is nothing to say. Qualities of feeling are as incomparable as they are indescribable. They mark the limit of the capacity of language to communicate."

Améry continues in the next line of his essay: "If someone wanted to impart their physical pain, he would be forced to inflict it" (1980, page 33). As much as Améry's essay is testimony to the essential brutality of the Nazi regime it is testimony to the falling short of words, of language even. As much as Améry's essay delivers us to that July afternoon it pulls away from us and marks the inability of words to make the reader or the listener, the correspondent, suffer what the other has suffered (see Perrin, 2004). An interruption of our ability to comprehend, as when on entering a casement in Breendonk the narrator of W G Sebald's novel *Austerlitz* finds himself overwhelmed:

> "Black striations began to appear before my eyes, and I had to rest my forehead against the wall, which was gritty, covered with bluish spots, and seemed to me to be perspiring with cold beads of sweat" (2001, page 33).

Not an act of communion or empathy but rather an experience of severance, of the tearing or breaking of comprehension which calls Sebald's narrator, singularly and bodily. Too close. A moment later the narrator reflects on how in his later life Gaston Novelli, also tortured by the Gestapo, painted the letter A repeatedly,

> "which he traced on the coloured ground he had applied sometimes with the point of a pencil, sometimes with the stem of this brush or an even blunter instrument, in ranks of scarcely legible ciphers crowding closely together and above one another, always the same but never repeating themselves, rising and falling in waves like a long-drawn-out scream" (Sebald, 2001, pages 35–36):

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

Standing alone in the casement, Sebald's narrator understands the impossibility of suffering in another's place, that meaning, representation, language, that the very words out of which he is woven, will have always fallen short, will always fail to make us experience what the other has experienced. As Sebald writes elsewhere:

"The words that Améry set down on paper, and which seem to us so full of lucidity, to him merely outlined his own incurable malady and drew a dividing line between '*deux mondes incommunicables*'" (2003, page 167, original emphasis).

And yet Améry does write, he documents and describes, not in order to overcome or in spite of this interval but rather *because* of it; his account comes together and gains its force, which is to say its claim on us, *as* it remarks upon and gathers itself around this interruption or interval.

The ontological and the ethical form not two *orders* which would oppose and interrupt each other but rather, and following our discussion of the nonrelational and the nonrepresentational, "An interrupted series, a series of interlaced interruptions, a series of *hiatuses*" (Derrida, quoted in Critchley, 1999, page 128, original emphasis). To restate our impasse one last time; testimony as, on the one hand, doubtable and divisible, as narrative or description which concerns the true, and, on the other hand, as otherwise than knowledge, a truth irreducible to the truth of disclosure and which thereby surpasses comprehension; as a promise, an unreadability or a silence which is not contingent or external to testimony but rather clearly etched and encrypted therein; an "unreadability" which "arrives or happens, like the date, with the first inscription" (Derrida, 1995b, page 389). Here, as Hatley writes, the "epistemological vigilance" which rightly surrounds testimony is not first and foremost "for the sake of some abstract ideal of objectivity [...] but for the sake of those who have been *truly* wronged" (2000, page 114, original emphasis). Finally then—and somewhat obliquely and elliptically no doubt—we are returned to speech, returned because it is, in a certain way, silent.

Only by this—this shrewd obliquity
of speech, the broken word and the white lie,
do we check ourselves, as we might halt the sun
one degree from the meridian

then wedge it by the thickness of a book
that everything might keep the blackedged look
of things, and that there might be time enough
to die in, dark to read by, distance to love.

(from *The White Lie* Don Patterson, 2003, pages 83 – 84)

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