EXPRESSING THE INEXPRESSIBLE:
BEARING WITNESS IN JEAN-FRANÇOIS LYOTARD AND PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty College and
Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Mélanie Victoria Walton

December 2009
ABSTRACT

EXPRESSING THE INEXPRESSIBLE:

BEARING WITNESS IN JEAN-FRANÇOIS LYOTARD AND PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS

By

Mélanie Victoria Walton

December 2009

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Lanei Rodemeyer, Ph.D.

What is an expression that can express that which cannot be expressed? Logic and grammar will declare it to be an impossibility and its expression, a mistaken use of language. Yet, humanity’s archive persistently attests to both the legitimacy of the inexpressible expression and the multiplicity of ways to give it voice. While heterogeneous in time, place, and philosophical situation, the contemporary French father of postmodernism, Jean-François Lyotard, and the late antique, presumably Syrian father of Neoplatonist Christian mysticism, Pseudo-Dionysius, both intimately consider the inexpressible expression. Both are provoked by the witness who is silenced by the binding limits of grammatical possibility, even while called to testify to an ineffable. Both define this inexpressible as precisely that which must be expressed in the face of logic deeming it absurd. To endeavor under the weight of impossibility reveals both
Lyotard’s postmodernism and Pseudo-Dionysius’ philosophic-theology as pedagogic pursuits, as spiritual exercises in the originary sense of philosophy as the love of wisdom, rather than analytic treatises of self-subsistent theories.

The plight of bearing witness to the ineffable is explored through the guiding example in Lyotard’s *The Differend*, the differend created by historical revisionism’s logical bind that forbids the Auschwitz survivor to testify to the existence of gas chambers (there cannot be a living survivor to a death camp). By taking the challenge seriously, Lyotard reveals that the force of this differend is not its circularity, but the mind’s conceptual deficit before the Holocaust: the singular event overflows its possible comprehension. The witness’ case is parallel to how reason can silence the faithful’s testimony of God, He who exceeds all that we could know of Him. But faith demands the pursuit of this knowledge in the face of its absurdity. The radical conjunction of apophatic and cataphatic theologies in Pseudo-Dionysius’ *The Divine Names* reveals a productive, stuttering method to name He who exceeds all names. Pseudo-Dionysius’ most remarkable divine name is *Eros*. Its exceptionality in capturing an expression of the inexpressible prompts a demonstration of a Lyotardian rereading of the conjunction of *eros* and silence as a productive phrase to dissolve differends.
DEDICATION

This project may find one site of origin in my own inexpressibility as a child and another in the inexpressibility that was my first, captivated response to philosophy. To honor these ambiguous origins, I dedicate this work to my family and those friends and professors who struggled to understand me through the years and permitted the possibility of this expression: Ba, Dad, Ben, Cliff, Clancy, Bettina, Nancy Baker and Bob Zimmerman of Sarah Lawrence College (without whom I’d still be trying to be a poet), and, most of all, to the utter comprehension by and unconditional love of Nikki, Kali, and Tal and their endless hours of attention and rejuvenating moments of distraction.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank, most sincerely, Lanei Rodemeyer, Thérèse Bonin, and Bettina Bergo for their rigorous guidance and kindness through years of tutelage prior and those years dedicated to the germination and creation of this project.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction: What is the Inexpressible Expression?</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Witness and Testimony</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1. Prologue to the Problem: The Inexpressible</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2. The Witness and Testimony in Lyotard</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3. Heidegger’s Silence: The Synthesis of Language and Being</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4. Lyotard on Testimonial Narrative</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5. The Witness and Testimony in Pseudo-Dionysius</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6. Concluding Remarks</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Con-Textualizations: Jean-François Lyotard</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1. The Difficulty of Characterization</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2. What is Postmodernism?</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3. Lyotard’s <em>The Differend</em></td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. <em>And</em> as Linkage in Gertrude Stein</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Therapeutic Language Games in Ludwig Wittgenstein</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Parataxis in Theodor Adorno</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Authorization of the Addressee in the Cashinahua</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Concluding Remarks</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Con-Textualizations: Pseudo-Dionysius ................................................................. 148

3.1. The Difficulty of Characterization.................................................................148
   a. Neoplatonism .............................................................................................152
   b. Mysticism ..................................................................................................168

3.2. Pseudo-Dionysius’ *The Divine Names* ......................................................178
   a. Naming Names .........................................................................................182
   b. Good and Light .........................................................................................190
   c. Beauty and Eros .........................................................................................193
   d. Evil and Proportionate Privation ...............................................................200
   e. Mystical Language and Spiritual Exercise .................................................207

4. Silence and Eros ................................................................................................... 215

4.1. Introduction to a Last/Further Solution .........................................................215
4.2. The Symbiosis of Silence and *Eros* ..............................................................221
4.3. Lyotard on the Possibility of a Just Silence ..................................................243
4.4. Reading Lyotard on *Eros* to Read Pseudo-Dionysius on *Eros* ..................264

Conclusion: The Expression of the Inexpressible ................................................. 286

References ............................................................................................................. 298
Introduction

What is the Inexpressible Expression?

“Perhaps what is inexpressible (what I find mysterious and am not able to express) is the background against which whatever I could express has its meaning.”
—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value.* ¹

“What if the book were only infinite memory of a word lacking? Thus absence speaks to absence”
—Edmond Jabès, “Adam, or the Birth of Anxiety.”²

What is an expression that can express that which cannot be expressed?

Logicians and grammarians may say such an expression cannot say what cannot be said: it is an impossibility—or, at the very least, a sloppy use of language. But, humanity’s intellectual and literary record eloquently and garrulously attests to both the legitimacy of the inexpressible expression and the multiplicity of ways to give it voice. Its every articulation must be meaningful if each so subverts that sensibility by which the logicians and grammarians judge; every judgment of a transgression must begin from the affirmation that it can be understood by the offended rule.

While heterogeneous in time, place, and philosophical situation, the contemporary French father of postmodernism, Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998), and the late

---


antique, presumably Syrian father of Neoplatonist Christian mysticism, Pseudo-Dionysius (ca. 471-528 C.E.\(^3\)), both rigorously and intimately consider the inexpressible expression. Both are provoked by the witness who is silenced by the binding limits of grammatical possibility, even while called to testify to an ineffable. Their examples are remarkably distinct, the Holocaust survivor and the religious faithful, yet, intone equal imperative to their expression. Both define the inexpressible as precisely that which must be expressed in the face of logic deeming it absurd. They both proceed by considerably similar methods and styles. Their endeavors, under the weight of impossibility, reveal both Lyotard’s postmodernism and Pseudo-Dionysius’ philosophic-theology as akin: while postmodernism is founded on a secular and rigorous science of stripping away misleading “grand narratives” in philosophic thinking, it operates with a reverence for unknown possibility and by methods similar to religious mysticism. Both are pedagogic pursuits, spiritual exercises in the originary sense of philosophy as the love of wisdom and its activity as an exercise of seeking it in the face of adversity and into and though perplexity.

Religion’s intimacy with the inexpressible and its elaboration is far better documented than postmodernism’s: God creates by speaking creations’ names, angels need not speak for they communicate instantly through intuition alone, God spoke to Adam through thunder and lightning, to Moses through a burning bush, to Joan d’Arc through provocative visions and dreams. “If we are to understand it [God’s communication] … we must conceive of a language that, although not translatable into any known idiom, is still, through special grace or disposition, comprehensible to its

\(^3\) This incorporates the scholarly dispute between his birth of ca. 471 or 485 and his death of 518 or 528.
Thus, these incomprehensible communications are made comprehensible by expression in metaphor, riddles, and koans, parables, confessions, and testimony, and through often interpretive, third-party transcriptions. Religion, traditionally, has granted greater leniency to these paradoxical expressions of the inexpressible, codifying them within their canon and recognizing them within their traditions. The meaning of these incomprehensible communications may be mutable in each account but, as each acknowledges its inexpressibility, each also grants it a meaning transcending possible, logical transcription. The faithful accept the apology of inadequate language to express the meaning and truth of the inexpressible. It is the skeptic, critic, competing religion, and philosopher (who sees reason as faith’s opposite) who ask: what makes these expressions inexpressible and strictly repellent to logic and how can meaning operate outside of the rules governing meaning’s communication?

Philosophy, by an uncanny conjunction of analytics and postmodernists, has been obsessed with these questions to the detriment of the inexpressible and its logical and ontological legitimacy. Aristotelian logic, most simply, entails that a valid argument necessitates the truth of its premise. Hilary Putnam, W.V.Quine, and Michael Dummett debated whether the formal validity of arguments must necessitate their premises to be empirically verifiable. The logical problem at stake is whether truth can be deduced from premises that can be verified neither empirically nor formally. Many have taken up the various facets of this question. Lyotard invokes the notable engagement of the

---


question, long before the analytics became involved, in Hegel’s disdain for the abstraction of law, born from its desire to universalize the concrete. His disdain challenges the utility of formal logic’s complaints about non-contradiction because, sometimes, as in the case of the inexpressible expression, statements are true and contradictory. Lyotard also works within the convoluted framework of legal judgments to unravel how the witness to the inexpressible is silenced by a tribunal who operates by a logic that exceeds the rigor life unfolds and demands logical exposition when there cannot be any. This logic of the tribunal is the logic that binds us, keeps us from truthfully calling the meaningful expression of an inexpressible an actual, logical expression. Our canon offers many precedents—Husserl acknowledges gestures and nonsense in his investigation into meaning and sense, Wittgenstein acknowledges the body and grunts as meaningful expressions, and Lyotard acknowledges the communication of a cat’s swishing tail—but a judge and jury will not allow these expressions to be legitimate testimony.

My dissertation undertakes an exploration of this problem of the expression of the inexpressible as a philosophical exercise into the problem of bearing witness to that which forbids its testimony. This problem cannot be limited by linguistic, logical, or epistemological confines. Exploring the identity between two instances of the ineffable from radically differing thinkers, times, and intents helps to illuminate the problem’s frequent historical recurrence and the breadth of its ontological, aesthetic, and political

---


dimensions and consequences. The universality of the experience of the inexpressible expression does not diminish the exceptionality of its address by Lyotard and Pseudo-Dionysius and the productivity and richness of reading their expressions together.

For Lyotard, the problem of witnessing is introduced by the provocative declaration: “You are informed that human beings endowed with language were placed in a situation such that none of them is now able to tell about it.”9 This situation, wherein one finds testimony impossible, is a differend. A differend is an impasse to successful communication; it is an insurmountable gulf between heterogeneous phrase regimes that forbids the translation of one’s meaning into anything the other side could comprehend. Lyotard’s most poignant example is the holocaust survivor whose testimony is illegitimated by a logical bind born from Robert Faurisson’s revisionist claim that his scientific research proves that there were no gas chambers in the Nazi concentration camps. The rules of this bind limit a truthful response to the objective demonstration of personal experience and therefore prohibit the living witness from testifying to her own death by gas. The vicious logic perpetrates a second wrong against the already-victim. Instead of dismissing historical revisionism as hate speech, criminal, or inhuman, Lyotard takes up the bind and endeavors to unravel it from within itself. To dismiss it without challenging it within its own framework would only bolster its power and falsely affirm its logic. Ultimately, the revisionist’s logic is shown to be constructed poorly but still significant in that it points beyond itself to the true challenge: that “Auschwitz” is an event of such proportion that it does exceed our capacity to encapsulate it. This example demonstrates the central challenge of his book, that is, the necessity of the address of the

---

addressing all differends even as the possibility of bridging these impasses is likely to fail.

Pseudo-Dionysius does effectively found a method by which to express the impossible knowledge of God aided through the theory of Neoplatonist emanation and by a practice of a radical conjunction of apophatic (negative) and cataphatic (affirmative) theologies. God is an unique inexpressible, yet remarkably comparable to Lyotard’s example. God is the differend between skeptics and the faithful much like the victim and the revisionist, but, also, like “Auschwitz,” He, Himself, is both the limit of human comprehension and He who calls us to know Him. Pseudo-Dionysius confronts the inexpressibility by working from the premise that all that is, is from God, it was of God before it was in creation, and, thus, to know it is to have a partial knowledge of He who “surpasses all discourse and all knowledge.” Pseudo-Dionysius’ expression of this knowledge is radically honest and represents the nature of the knowledge itself: it affirms and denies itself. A strict affirmative theology would compound all these fragments of knowledge together into a mural to represent God. But, Pseudo-Dionysius rejects that this could truthfully depict He who exceeds our comprehension because God, like the event, for Lyotard, overflows its possible encapsulation. God is “nameless and yet has all the names of everything that is;” He fills and floods the containment of every name and thus every name granted to God must also be denied as insufficient. Pseudo-Dionysius’ method, then, conjoins negative theology, the rejection of the possibility of knowing and naming God, to his almost every affirmation of a divine name. For example, God is and

---


11 Ibid., 596C.
is not Good because He creates good and exceeds it. The discordant, or stuttering conjunction affirms and denies the legitimacy of each scrap of Scriptural and sensible knowledge to be a name of God thereby presenting and withdrawing a representation of the Inexpressible.

Pseudo-Dionysius’ treatise proceeds in this manner to delineate the divine names of God. It is structured as a letter to a colleague, proffering itself as a model by which to acquire divine knowledge and of honoring God until one may, presumably though this form of praise, be granted divine union and truly know He who is the object of our desire and search. His treatise, then, is as much pedagogic as it is an encyclopedia of names and is, thus, parallel to how Lyotard’s search for a new idiom is as pedagogical as it is an analysis of language’s confrontation with its limits. Pseudo-Dionysius’ text acknowledges the unknowability of God and allows that silence may express it if his stuttering speech may fail, but, nonetheless, persists in his project of delineating the divine names. Likewise, Lyotard demonstrates the necessity of seeking the unknown idiom that could bridge the differend even while affirming the likely possibility of its very impossibility.

My dissertation interprets their persistence in expressing the inexpressible as demonstration of a valuable pedagogy. Seeking to honor their lesson, my project concludes its elaboration of the problem of bearing witness and their respective treatments by weaving their thought together so that Pseudo-Dionysius’ text is read as Lyotard shows one to read texts and what is revealed therein is then used to proffer Lyotard a new option that may be fruitful for his witness called to testify to the inexpressible.
My first chapter seeks to elaborate the problem of witnessing and testimony through these two examples while endeavoring to expand the problem beyond one of linguistics, logic, and/or epistemology. The inexpressible confounds a definition of the self as the rational animal if reason means that we can speak of that which we know and we can know that which we experience. The inexpressible affirms that the self must also be understood as a desiring animal, one who seeks what one does not know, which means one seeks the contours around that of which reason can speak. Through an investigation into the conjunction of language and Being in Heidegger, this chapter proposes a reading of the problem of testimony as an ontological problem. To silence the witness’ expression of the inexpressible by logical decrees of non-contradiction or demands of verifiability is not to impinge merely upon one’s right to speech but upon one’s right to be. Silencing becomes an ontological murder. This reading emphasizes the ethical weight of the problem of bearing witness to that which evades testimony. Yet, the form of language that Heidegger unifies with Being is not the idle chatter of the they, but language that has the character of reticence, that is, language as silence. Silence, then, becomes a redemptive shelter affirming the Being of the witness.

Despite the salvation that a positive account of silence may offer the witness, Lyotard critiques Heidegger’s romantic endorsement as unable to undo the wrong of the silencing of the victim’s testimony. Further, while he accepts a communion of language and Being, so as to underscore the violence of the prohibition of testimony and the importance of taking up and working through these differends, he only accepts it as an ontic, not ontological conjunction. He accedes what Heidegger would deem metaphysical: for Lyotard, it is not Being, but the human being who is brought to
language and to silence. A phrase, including that of silence, can speak of beings but not the totality that is Being-itself. Lyotard’s partial acceptance and partial denial of Heidegger is carefully constructed so that he may posit the occurrence of the phrase as something very akin, yet not identical, to Heidegger’s notion of *Ereignis*.

*Ereignis*, an event or occurrence for Heidegger, is both noun and verb, the site and activity of the source, presencing, and withdrawal of Being and language that calls us and brings us into what we are truly. For Lyotard, the phrase as *Ereignis*, being occurrence rather than object, may escape “the logical paradoxes that self-referential propositions give rise to” and highlights how the phrase *calls* to us for our response. However, Lyotard wishes to modify Heidegger’s *Ereignis* because he feels that it too easily becomes a silent shelter of Being, enclosing it rather than permitting it ecstasy, permitting it to stand outside of itself. The witness trapped by the historical revisionists because she cannot be alive and testify to her death must uncover a phrase that lets her stand outside of her singular, living body without eliminating her possibility of the sensuous experience of eye-witnessing. Lyotard’s rigorous consideration and persuasive critique of Heidegger reveals the importance of the call and ecstasy and refuses a conclusive condemnation of the nature and value silence and also reveals the mode by which he will address each option for the witness.

Heidegger’s synthesis of language and Being and Lyotard’s review also introduce numerous concepts compatible with and whose sources are in the Neoplatonist tradition from which Pseudo-Dionysius works. For example, Heidegger’s *logos* as origin and means to come to know the origin invokes Pseudo-Dionysian emanation theory wherein procession and reversion ground an epistemological claim—yet, for all, this epistemology

---

reveals and covers itself over because, like the basic premise of apophatic theology, the truth exceeds its singular expression. Therefore, an investigation into Pseudo-Dionysius’ bearing witness to and offering testimony about He who exceeds our possible comprehension is eminently valuable to reveal how one may redeem the honor of silence even while being called to violate it, reverently, to do justice and give praise to the Inexpressible. The praise’s *content* is the discernment of the divine names of God, but, within this first chapter, I examine at length the *form* of this praise as Pseudo-Dionysius’ radical conjunction of apophatic and cataphatic theologies. This defiance of logic in the conjunction of contradictions is the only possible way to testify to knowing the unknowability of God. Just as emanation theory permits God to stand outside of his unknowability by being creator of all that is, Pseudo-Dionysius’ method of naming and unnaming God permits humanity participation in the reversion to our origin, that is, to stand outside of our limitation and in the impossible knowledge of God. But, when Pseudo-Dionysius speaks the name of God that most provocatively captures this ecstasy of knowing the ineffable, the name *Eros*, he nervously apologizes for the inadequacy of language.

Lyotard is seeking an idiom by which the silenced witness could give testimony to what the revisionist logic deemed impossible. He diagnoses the testimonial requirements given by the double bind to reveal how it needs its narration to mimic scientific objectivity, present itself as a showing of the wrong, and be spoken from both within the body capable of eye-witnessing and outside of the body who still lives, so as to testify to death. These requirements explain the onset of desperation in *The Differend’s* central chapters. His own voice wavers under the impossibility of such an idiom much
like Pseudo-Dionysius’ voice trembles when he introduces the most radical name for God, *Eros*. The central two chapters of my dissertation seek to ground and contextualize these voices so that the final chapter can explore the failure of expressing the inexpressible and this failure’s productivity as a call to craft a dialogue on silence and *eros* as another, a potential, or a final solution to the problem of bearing witness.

Chapters two and three, thus, mirror one another, independently contextualizing the two thinkers and their two texts central to this project, Lyotard’s *The Differend* and Pseudo-Dionysius’ *The Divine Names*, into their respective intellectual situations. The heterogeneity of the thinkers and their works calls for independent chapters, yet, their parallelism permits the foundation to be laid for a true *con-texere*, a weaving together, of the two into dialogue in the project’s final chapter. Each inner chapter addresses the difficulty of characterizing the thinkers and introduces the historical and theoretical climates of their respective movements before turning to close, textual readings of their respective works. These chapters also, importantly, introduce the profusion of productive linkages between the two thinkers.

Each are resistant to concrete characterization. Lyotard’s writing was prolific, his topics tremendously diverse, and his style constantly adapted itself to the topic at hand without ever shedding its frustrating complexity. While there are many subtle difficulties to encapsulating Pseudo-Dionysius’ thought, the most profound stump is that he is, precisely, a pseudonym. Pseudo-Dionysius is not Dionysius the Areopagite—a distinguished convert of St. Paul in Acts 17 and an Athenian member of the judicial council. He who unremittingly invoked the power of names to permit one to know their creator, refuses us his own, truthful name. His pseudonym, however, does successfully
express the union of potentially conflicting sources that compose his intellectual
background: Neoplatonism and Christianity. Lyotard shares a background of incendiary
influences: radical Marxian politics, phenomenology, and Freudian psychoanalysis
steeped in his deep knowledge of the history of philosophy and helped influence the
development of post-structuralism while sustaining an abiding passion for aesthetics and
art criticism. Their respective resistances to concrete characterization foreshadows the
equal obscurity of their schools of postmodernism and mysticism.

Postmodernism, for Lyotard, means something very different than how the term is
used in the everyday market place of contemporary theories and catch-phrases. It is
neither a diachronical next period after the modern nor is it the modern’s overturning by
an interruption of linearity through an eclecticism or roughshod assembly of artifacts.
Instead, postmodernism is primarily methodological and purports an anti-historicism and
active uncovering of bias akin to Husserl’s phenomenology. Its endeavor is to lay bare
what otherwise remains un-presented or covered over. Lyotard prefers to name it “re-
writing modernity” to emphasize its persistent re-velation and re-address of the
prejudicing and fictive grand narratives to which our thought so easily succumbs. The
Re- of re-writing refuses any idea of a re-turn to an origin or answer, but encourages a
working through that is pro-ductive and pro-motive of, in some cases, new pro-grams or,
in others, the persistence of its own activity.

Postmodernism’s emphasis of the activity of the Re- and Pro- also invokes the
theory of procession and reversion that underlies Pseudo-Dionysius’ mysticism. Also
like Lyotard’s postmodernism, mysticism endeavors to uncover and experience
(physically or by knowing) that which can neither be seen nor understood. Its etymology
tells us that it is that knowing that neither comes from the eyes nor is communicable through the lips. For Pseudo-Dionysius, mysticism is faith and philosophy’s activity, the discernment of and contemplation on the knowability and unknowability of God that engages him into the cycle from which the knowledge comes and to which all longs to return: God.

The central chapters then turn to textual analysis to further the elaboration of how to express the inexpressible. Within Lyotard’s *The Differend*, I focus on four options upon which the witness could model an unprecedented idiom to bridge the impasse rendered by the revisionist’s bind. The first is the stream of consciousness style of Gertrude Stein that employs infinite “ands” to permit linkages between phrases beyond grammar and narrative context. Next, is Ludwig Wittgenstein’s theory of linkages between language games whose identification, which is the activity of philosophy, is a form of therapy. Third, is Theodor Adorno’s use of parataxis, which is the elimination of logical, grammatical connectors in writing. Finally, is the *miyoi*, the traditional narrative style of the Cashinahua Indians, which employs a very strict formula of denomination that authorizes every legitimate addressee the right to be its addressee. Ultimately, each of these radically, logically disruptive styles proves to be a productive investigation even as each fails to found the impossible idiom that could trespass the gulf between utterly heterogeneous phrase regimes.

Within Pseudo-Dionysius’ *The Divine Names*, I focus upon both his radical method by which he speaks and this speech’s inexpressible content, which is the delineation of the names of God. The names upon which I focus include Good, Light, Beautiful, and Yearning; following these names, I briefly consider his reflection on evil.
These names and his thought on evil permit me to unfold his intellectual inheritance from Greek philosophy while presenting his intellectual contribution as that philosophy’s radical merger with Scriptural doctrine that yields a thought that profoundly impacts epistemology and aesthetics as much as theology. The conceptual bounty of his justification of knowing the unknowable, the conjunctions of reverent silence and speech’s affirmation and denial, the revelation of the power by which beauty beckons, the radicality of naming God not agape but eros, the universality of eros, and his examination of the simultaneous absence and plenitude in both eros and evil proves it to be a most promising final option for exploration for Lyotard’s witness.

While the first chapter asked if there was not a paradox at the heart of self-knowledge—can the rational animal bear witness to the inexpressible if reason means that one can know and speak of what one experiences?—the final chapter explores the activity of self-knowing as an exercise of striving to know what one does not. Socrates’ Apology explains his philosophical activity, his gadfly nature, to be the result of a divine command. Through the middle ages, this persistent striving for self-knowledge and dedication to contemplation was spoken of as spiritual exercise. Lyotard’s postmodernism, as a method of re-reading and re-writing with the intent of reawakening problems from out of a stagnation of “grand narratives” or keeping them awake in memory when they evade a narrative structure, is its contemporary instantiation. The fourth chapter begins from a plateau upon which the case has been made that the inexpressible must be expressed but every attempted expression of it that Lyotard has delineated has failed in some regard. What remains is to employ Lyotard’s method of
The final chapter takes on Lyotard and Pseudo-Dionysius’ persistence of expressing the inexpressible as a pedagogic lesson underlying their rich texts and applies it back to their works, re-reading them together so as to uncover an entirely new option, born from the very re-reading, for letting the witness speak the ineffable. A Lyotardian re-reading of *The Divine Names* reveals an unspoken similarity between the natures of silence and *eros* as simultaneous void and overfull of meaning at once and that their comprehension requires their conceptual symbiosis. Silence must be heard through the passions and *eros* must be addressed with the reverence and logical-abatement of silence. This Lyotardian symbiosis of Pseudo-Dionysius’ concepts then becomes the content whose viability must be explored for Lyotard’s witness called to testify to the inexpressible. This final option first demands a re-reading of Lyotard’s previous critique of silence to explore how his work contains and permits its positive account, one that would let it be a just testimony. Then it demands a re-reading of how *The Differend’s* dismissal of the Christian narrative of love does not prohibit *eros* to be a viable response, which is shown through Lyotard’s posthumous writings on Augustine’s *Confessions*. The later work reveals a reading of *eros* that is uniquely complementary to Pseudo-Dionysius’ and reveals how it may be an expression of privation and plenitude at once that both inspires obsessively reverent contemplation and agitates oneself out of oneself, thus speaking to all of the requirements that an expression of the inexpressible must.

In conclusion, the synthesis of silence and *eros* demonstrates itself to be the most productive option for expressing the inexpressible. It undermines the limitations of the
revisionist logic as it also evades the varying faults to which Stein, Wittgenstein, Adorno, and the Cashinahua fell prey; instead, its effectiveness is in its embrace and expansion of the constructive elements each previous option revealed. Before the tribunal, however, this expression could still fail to effectively communicate between all parties because it works by a disruption of reason that prohibits its transcription within the phrase regimen commonly used by the courts. In that case, the solution fails. But, in all other regards, this failure is also a measure of the option’s success. First, because it is productive of the internal conditions for the continuation of delineation, re-reading, re-writing, and spiritual exercise that grounded the endeavors of Lyotard and Pseudo-Dionysius. Finally, because it is productive in forging new paths outside and back into the canon to satisfy the re-emergence of phenomenological interest in addressing, through something other-than-reason, that which resists presentation.
Chapter One

Witness and Testimony

1.1. Prologue to the Problem: The Inexpressible

Aristotle defines humanity as the rational animal. Socrates defines wisdom as knowing what one does not know. This project seeks a synthesis: understanding humanity as that creature whose activity is seeking the unknown. Being, then, may best be understood not by the success of reason, but by the attempt to trace the contours of the edges of reason. The history of philosophy illuminates how this search leads to frustration, to *aporia*. It is precisely within this perplexity that the meaning of being can be located. Thus, the problem to be explored in this current work is the expression of the inexpressible as the activity of humanity attempting to define itself. This problem demands elucidation and justification: what is expression, what is the inexpressible, and why must we express it? Expression concerns itself with revelation; to express something is to reveal something’s meaning, whether verbally or through gesture or through symbolic representation in words or art. The inexpressible can be wisdom, being, God, truth, or the conflict of these very things. The reason we find ourselves compelled to expressing expression’s impossibility is our own divine command, our own attempt to be what one is: the lover who actively seeks that which she lacks.
This project, then, is concerned with elaborating the expression of the inexpressible and with elucidating the nature and being of the witness who attempts to bear witness to that which repels testimony and the nature and being of that very testimony. This project is conducted primarily through Jean-François Lyotard’s *The Differend* and Pseudo-Dionysius’ *The Divine Names*. The former is the contemporary French “father of postmodernism” and the latter is the pseudonymous fifth century Syrian Neoplatonist Christian. Lyotard’s work unravels the logical, linguistic, ontological, and ethical implications of the holocaust survivor who cannot give acceptable testimony to the horror of the death camps. Pseudo-Dionysius’ work radicalizes both Neoplatonism and Christianity by synthesizing cataphatic and apophatic theology together into a method to name God. Both works give us an example of a witness to the inexpressible: the death camp survivor to her own death and the faithful to his creator. Both works give us an example of a witness who ceaselessly tries against reason to express the inexpressible. Testimony is the given evidence about what one knows. It grants the witness her very existence as witness. If it is impossible, then we have uncovered an essential paradox at the heart of self-knowledge. In other words, if the meaning of being is born from that which we cannot know, then there cannot be any truthful testimony to this meaning. Lyotard offers us a rigorous dissection of this double bind but lets us have no certain conclusion. Thus, Pseudo-Dionysius’ radical method serves to proffer Lyotard a possible synthesis of silence and *eros* as a productive mode of expression of the inexpressible.

What is discovered about the witness to the ineffable is that she is often reduced to one of two actions: the witness may give false testimony or be silent. In the first case,
her testimony cannot be considered true because it testifies to what she cannot know. Likewise, in the latter case, her testimony cannot be considered true for she presents no testimony. The witness’ silence may have one of many causes. One may be that, when faced with the ineffable, she finds herself overwhelmed, unable to call upon reason to supply her with words appropriate to describe that which exceeds rational comprehension; in other words, she is struck dumb. Her silence, here, is actually a response to the excess of possible phrases and the impossible selection of any one appropriate one. Another reason for her silence may be because that is the only truthful stance to take; she does honor to the inexpressible by remaining in silence. Another reason may be that, as she finds herself unable to speak, she finds herself as less than a subject according to the definition of humanity as the rational animal, as the animal who can speak. In a circular bind, robbed of subjectivity, she is prohibited voice; her inability to speak enacted a murder. The divisions between these reasons are often blurred, as are their implications; this obfuscates the task of exploring the expression that expresses the inexpressible. Thus, this first chapter begins with a survey of the problem of bearing witness in Lyotard’s *The Differend*, then carefully elaborates the implications to the subjectivity of a silenced witness by recourse to Martin Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology, and finally broaches a potential salvation by introducing the radical method created by Pseudo-Dionysius to testify to the ineffable.
1.2. The Witness and Testimony in Lyotard

Lyotard’s *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* unravels the paradox of the inexpressible expression. It untangles the logical, linguistic, ontological, and ethical implications of the double bind born from the impossibility of a witness’ testimony, most profoundly, the case of the holocaust survivor who cannot give testimony to the horror of the death camps. His work offers us an explication of the testimonial victimization of those who are denied their own histories, people marginalized outside of the political or juridical space in which they could protest, despite their being called to these very spheres. It focuses our awareness on the instances of lived reality that demand our attention, and yet evade logical formula. These instances render the attempt to give testimony to them, within the rules of linear narrative, as a certain failure. When testimony fails, it silences a victim, further victimizes an already-victim.

Lyotard’s primary example, the holocaust survivor, is first encountered on behalf of an exploration (later, one realizes it is a devastating critique) nominally in response to Robert Faurisson’s revisionist claim that his diligent and scientific research proves that there were no gas chambers in the Nazi concentration camps.¹³ Lyotard neither explicitly confronts Faurisson nor does he directly attack his theory, instead, he addresses the reader of his own work about the adjudicative violence that this form of a claim casts on the survivors/witnesses to the death camps: “You are informed that human beings

---

¹³ Faurisson is described in Pierre Vidal-Naquet’s work, which Lyotard references, as “[p]ursuing his crusade—whose theme may be summarized as follows: the gas chambers did not exist because they can not have existed; they can not have existed because they should not have existed; or better still: they did not exist because they did not exist—Robert Faurisson has just published a new book.” A book that is “… neither more nor less mendacious and dishonest than the preceding ones” (Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *On Faurisson and Chomsky*, collected in *Assassins of Memory*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992. Reprinted electronically at http://www.anti-rev.org/textes/VidalNaquet81b/).
endowed with language were placed in a situation such that none of them is now able to tell about it” (§1).¹⁴ Using propositional logic, Lyotard works out the implications of a claim like Faurisson’s for the death camp victim. Essentially, if a survivor argued that he was such, a survivor of the death camps, how would he argue being a victim if not dead? Almost universally, our reaction to this logic is one or another form of disgust. Historical revision is often an excuse for justifying hatred. The questioning of victims through the revisionist lens is something between insensitive and inhumane, let alone the fact that it begins from the absurdity of questioning verifiable fact about what is quite possibly the greatest instance of horror in modern history. And, emotions aside, the logic Faurisson employs is narrow minded and solipsistic. A further response is Lyotard’s own immediate quip, that “to Faurisson, it can be answered that no one can see one’s own death” (§49).

The problem, however, is that our immediate responses could be likened to the propagandistic method of insulting our critic instead of answering his critique, which only perpetuates the low level of social discourse. It covers over the ground from which the questions arose and breeds further room for skepticism. For example, Lyotard’s rebuke (a play on Heidegger’s infamous insight on the impossibility of reflecting on one’s own death in *Being and Time*) does not answer the revisionist claim from within the claim’s framework; the rebuke would neither be judged legitimate in logic nor court. The impact of the distasteful claim is in its force; we cannot answer from within its own logic: how can one answer the attack that demands one to prove one is a victim of death

¹⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), §1. All references to this work will be parenthetically indicated in the text by section number for the text’s main body or page number for its Notices, which are his in-text textual excurses.
and not dead? If she speaks, she is alive; she has lost the argument. “It is easy for an opponent to refute whoever affirms the reality of a referent by enclosing him in a dilemma … the one that assails all philosophies based on showing …” (§64). We may argue that this is unfair, but this complaint is likewise illegitimate as a response. This “double bind” (§8) that Faurisson develops abandons the victim to legal and logical damage and/or to silence:

This is what a wrong would be: a damage accompanied by the loss of the means to prove the damage. This is the case if the victim is deprived of life, or of all his or her liberties, or the freedom to make his or her ideas or opinions public, or simply the right to testify to the damage, or even more simply if the testifying phrase is itself deprived of authority … (§7).

If one’s testimony is stripped of its authority by this legal logic, and one testifies in the face of this lack, one is then judged as deceived or as offering false testimony. Regardless of intending the deceit or not, either way, the victim is effectively forbidden from being a witness. By definition, a witness is one who gives testimony of what she has seen or knows. Thus, this victim cannot be a witness; she is effectively silenced (§7). An elaboration of this victimization of the victim that Lyotard is pointing to can be found within the actual testimony in the Nuremberg Trials. I will first quote the testimony of a victim, Marie Claude-Valliant-Couturier, who spent three years interned at Auschwitz for being a member of the French Resistance, in order to permit it to reveal three problematic forms of witnessing:

… [W]e saw the unsealing of the cars and the soldiers letting men, women, and children out of them.

… I know these details as I knew a little Jewess from France who lived with her family at the ‘Republique’ district.

… One night we were awakened by terrifying cries. And we discovered, on the following day, from the men working in the Sonderkommando—the
'Gas Kommando’—that on the preceding day, the gas supply having run out, they had thrown the children into the furnaces alive.15

The first account comes the closest to the witnessing that is considered most true by legal and everyday logic: I saw X. Nonetheless, it is not a perfect account, for she speaks in the plural about a non-criminal action. The second account is “hearsay,” a second-hand report: I knew someone who told me so. The third account is the synthesis of the first two forms; it is a plural report of hearing something not apodictically criminal and only learning about the criminal through hearsay. The imperfection of her testimony is noted in the challenge from the defense lawyer:

MARX: … Does your statement contain what you yourself observed or is it concerned with information from other sources as well?

VAILLANT-COUTURIER: Whenever such was the case I mentioned it in my declaration. I have never quoted anything, which has not previously been verified at the sources and by several persons, but the major part of my evidence is based on personal experience.16

Marie Claude-Valliant-Couturier’s testimony about her personal, first-hand experiences reveal the non-criminal (I saw them open the cars, I heard the screams) and the criminal (I saw them beat the women), but cannot reveal the crime to which she testifies (the death camp was a death camp; i.e., I testify that it killed me). Logic forbids that testimony. If she were to testify to the logically impossible, she could not be judged as providing a true account. Logic requires that the victim of the death camp be dead while logic also forbids a witness who no longer exists, thus, for this narrow logic, there cannot be a victim who is a witness of the death camps. Her bind: she either offers what can only be judged as false testimony or she is silenced; either way, the victim is once again


16 Ibid.
victimized: her truth denied or prohibited. The Nuremberg Testimony of SS General Otto Ohlendorf, *Einsatzgruppe D*\(^{17}\) reveals how much easier it is to testify to the horror if you are on the side of actor and not recipient, for the defendant and not as the victim:

COL. AMEN: How do you know that there was such a written agreement [to create the *Einsatzgruppe*]?

OHLENDORF: I was repeatedly present during the negotiations which Albrecht and Schellenberg conducted with the OKH and OKW,\(^{18}\) and I also had a written copy of this agreement which was the outcome of these negotiations, in my own hands when I took over the Einsatzgruppe.

COL. AMEN: Did you yourself ever see a copy of this written agreement?

OHLENDORF: Yes!

COL. AMEN: Did you ever have occasion to work with this written agreement?

OHLENDORF: Yes!

COL. AMEN: On more than one occasion?

OHLENDORF: Yes; in all questions arising out of the relationship between the Einsatzgruppen and the army.

COL. AMEN: Do you know how many persons were liquidated by Einsatz Group D under your command?

OHLENDORF: In the year between June 1941 to June 1942 the Einsatzkommandos reported ninety thousand people liquidated.

COL. AMEN: Did that include men, women, and children?

OHLENDORF: Yes.

COL. AMEN: On what do you base those figures?

OHLENDORF: On reports sent by the Einsatzkommandos to the Einsatzgruppen.

COL. AMEN: Were those reports submitted to you?

OHLENDORF: Yes.

COL. AMEN: And you saw them and read them?

OHLENDORF: I beg your pardon?

\(^{17}\) “The Einsatzgruppen were four paramilitary units established before the invasion of the Soviet Union for the purpose of ‘liquidating’ … Jews, Romany, and political operatives of the Communist party. Ultimately three of these groups … were attached to army groups taking part in the invasion. A fourth group (Einsatzgruppe D) was sent to the Ukraine without being attached to any army group. All operated in the territories occupied by the Third Reich on the eastern front. Most of the crimes perpetrated by the Einsatzgruppen took place in the Ukraine and the Baltic states of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania” (Yale F. Edeiken, “An Introduction to the Einsatzgruppen,” available at: http://www.holocaust-history.org/intro-einsatz/). The *Einsatzkommandos*, mentioned below, were sub-groups of the *Einsatzgruppen* and those who were ordered to carry out the killings.

\(^{18}\) The *Oberkommando des Heeres*, Army High Command and *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, Armed Forces High Command of Wehrmacht, respectively.
COL. AMEN: And you saw and read those reports personally?

OHLENDORF: Yes.

COL. AMEN: Did you personally supervise mass executions of these individuals?

OHLENDORF: I was present at two mass executions for purposes of inspection.19

Within this binding juridical logic, Otto Ohlendorf, whatever else he may be, is a far better witness than Marie Claude-Valliant-Couturier: he was present, he saw written records, he personally added to records, he took reports, he was given reports … most importantly, he was there, as an official witness, no less; he saw it with his own eyes. But why do we ascribe the greatest objective reality to Ohlendorf’s testimony? Because he was there? Because he saw it with his own eyes? To concur with either of these reasons is to forget our philosophical heritage, to forget, among others, the Descartes of the Meditations. Immediately following his ontological declaration of the cogito, Descartes asks what else, besides thinking, can he be? His spontaneous inclination is to declare most real all that we had initially doubted, all those attributes that most immediately assault our sensory organs: I am a body, I am a human, I have two hands … All those things he immediately sees himself to be. But spontaneity pales under the sustained light of reason as illuminated by his example of the beeswax: that object that we “know” spontaneously by taste, smell, and feel is that object that is then set near the fire and begins to taste different, smell different, and feel different. While the sensuous properties all change, the wax in and of itself, as wax, does not; thus, the wax is only truly known by the mind alone.

This critique of realism is repeated in the Third Meditation when, critiquing adventitious ideas, Descartes offers two competing examples: the fire and the sun. The fire makes us think that ideas originate from outside sources because when we approach the fire we cannot but help to feel the heat, see the flames, smell the smoke. It is not a matter of will, it is not a judgment; it simply seems that we are hit by these ideas. As if the fire is proffering itself to us and we merely receive the knowledge of that which it is. However, Descartes counters this example with one of the sun: were we to walk outside and carefully raise our eyes, we would see the sun as a bright dot, perhaps an inch in diameter; yet, reason tells us that the sun is actually astronomically massive. Thus, the most truthful idea is not what seems to come to us from independent things in the world, from what we see with our own eyes, but the truth comes from that which reason alone provides. To grant precedence to reason is to grant legitimacy to that which can be certainly uncovered within the mind through deductive argumentation. Rational argument, for Descartes, conceptually and stylistically unfolds in a linear narrative with clear steps.

So, why do we ascribe the greatest objective reality to the eyewitness’ testimony, in this case, to the testimony of the SS officer Ohlendorf? It is not only because of our comfort and reliance on empirical testimony; rather, it is predominately because he has constructed a linear narrative (judged to be a rational one) within the logical framework that the legal proceeding demanded.\(^{20}\) This speaks to the heart of Lyotard’s reason for

\(^{20}\) This is notable in criminal cases where victim’s testimony is coached so as to be a chronicle; for example, the rapist was white, middle-aged male, he jumped out of the bushes, he was wearing a black sweatshirt … not that he appeared from nowhere scaring me so much I was blinded, I don’t know what he looked like or what happened. Testimony is not lived experience in the moment of living it; testimony is the reflection back over life and fixing and delineating of its order and import. Another expression of this difference is the testimony recorded immediately after a crime when one is in shock as opposed to testimony collected when one has recovered from the experience and can thus critically reflect upon it.
entertaining the legitimacy of the historical revisionist’s critique of holocaust testimony. The distasteful charge reveals the deficiency of the victim’s testimony in comparison to the coherent narrative of the captors and that the former’s deficiency is not judged upon its truth content. A false story is more readily accepted under what Lyotard terms the logic of the tribunal than a truthful account that contains its own contradiction.

According to Lyotard, this points to what he calls the differend [le différend]: “… the case where the plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes for that reason a victim” (§12). The foremost instantiation of a differend is illustrated by the superiority of the SS officer’s testimony over the victim’s. This is to say that we find a differend when the accuser and judge or jury speak according to a phrase regime prohibited to the accused or when the accuser and accused speak in idioms born from two different regimes with no judge or jury that could translate their claims into something decipherable by both sides.

These differends are not conflicts of differing languages per se; every language can be translated. Instead, Lyotard is revealing the existence of essential disconnects between the narratives and their genres employed by two parties. An initial example is to imagine the testimony of a scientist on DNA data collected at the scene of a crime versus the testimony of a mother who saw her only child brutally murdered. While their languages may be technically the same, it may be more accurate to consider them different: an emotional appeal to humanity cannot legitimately answer a scientific appeal to fact and objectivity. This is an example of narratives from different regimens composed by phrases from equally differing genres. Denominative phrases that name or ostensive phrases that show are not always legitimate answers to descriptive or cognitive
phrases that describe and signify. If one demands you to “tell me his name!” and you reply, “he is beautiful,” the descriptive genre of your response is impertinent to the ostensive genre of the demand.\footnote{Lyotard, \textit{The Differend}, Op. Cit., §227 and §64.}

Lyotard’s address of Faurisson’s logical bind is his attempt to meet the revisionist claim from within its own logical framework or phrase regime. He endeavors to unravel its bind by discerning the argument’s regimen and genre to understand what is required for its response to be valid. His aim is to untie the double bind by finding the “unknown idiom” by which the victim can give testimony to the primary wrong that can be judged as legitimate, thereby dissolving the secondary wrong of being silenced (§135). To find this legitimate response, according to Lyotard, is what is called for by the very revelation of the bind: “In the differend, something ‘asks’ to be put into phrases, and suffers from the wrong of not being able to be put into phrases right away” (§23). Overcoming the differend between victim and prosecution will seemingly ease the pain that accompanies, not the original violence itself, but the suffering that results from the witness’ incapacity to speak:

This is when the human beings who thought they could use language as an instrument of communication learn through the feeling of pain which accompanies silence … that they are summoned by language … to recognize that what remains to be phrased exceeds what they can presently phrase, and that they must be allowed to institute idioms which do not yet exist (§23).

It is a philosophic necessity, not just a moral obligation, that we find the narrative or invent the new register of discourse by which the victim can speak.\footnote{Ibid., §§102, 135, and 161-70.} As Lyotard examines in detail near the close of his book, an obligation humanisitically requires an
addressee who is called to respond whereas a necessity requires response for there to even be an address, addressee, and addressor (§§102, 135). The weight of the necessity is revealed in that if we do not seek the new idiom, the very being of the victim is threatened, not by force, but by a loss of its name. This exceeds humanistic concern by being the threat of an elimination of s/he who could be addressee or addressor. The necessity from the logical and the linguistic disruption reveals a blending of necessity and obligation: to lose one’s name is to lose one’s truth of being: silencing as murder. Your “existence is not concluded” if you, the witness, do not speak (§47), in other words, “human beings are names, or they are not human” (p.153).

Lyotard, again expressing our spontaneous, common sense reaction, declares: “It would be absurd to suppose that human beings ‘endowed with language’ cannot speak in the strict sense, as is the case for stones” (§15). Thus, we reason, some witnesses do not, instead of cannot, speak—perhaps because they are threatened if they do so. But, this is not strictly the case for the silenced victims of whom Lyotard speaks. Even if the silenced victims trespass the threat, and were to speak one day, either they would still be under the double bind of proving what they cannot, or we stumble into a new logical paradox in which we would have to imagine a threat leveled against, say, the life or happiness of one who would speak, “an unreal, conditional state … which cannot be threatened, since one is oneself unreal or conditional as long as one has not spoken …” (§15). In admitting the conditionalized status of the silenced party, Lyotard affirms her existence to be entirely contingent upon her silence: “But how could a threat work when it is exerted upon something … which does not currently exist” (§15)? He answers that the threat “is only a threat because the ability to speak or not to speak is identified with
The witness cannot testify because to testify one must be a subject and this witness’ subjectivity has been obliterated by the wrong. The vicious logic is that the wrong is that which deserves testimony and is that which prohibits testimony; it makes the witness a victim to a wrong as it strips the witness of existence and makes the witness a victim once more.

This last paradox, essentially, the circular logic of the victimized victim born from the synthesis of language and being, spawns a further paradox. This incessant circularity gives the victim “… not the vertigo of what cannot be phrased … but rather the irrefutable conviction that phrasing is endless” (§17). Just as language and being are interdependently linked, the inability to phrase is fused with the conviction of the impossibility of ceasing to phrase. For the victim, this infinity of responses minus one the tribunal will understand is her nausea. For the tribunal, “phrasing is endless” indicates the necessity that testimony can infinitely repeat itself, be comprehensible (requiring less affectivity and more objective disinterest), and prove itself to be logical (as verification demands the ability of repetition). For society, its endlessness must prohibit forgetting and founds testimony’s ethical imperative. Lyotard’s assertion that endlessness is vertigo is a linguistically playful, albeit apt, denomination. Vertigo, the dizziness, lightheaded feeling, or nausea often caused by looking down from great heights, comes from the Latin, vertere, intimately connected to the Latin versus, to the legal denotation of one party being against another. His allusion is more so apt for the tradition it conjures; for example, from Kierkegaard:

Anxiety may be compared with dizziness. He whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But what is the reason for
this? It is just as much in his own eye as in the abyss, for suppose he had not looked down.\textsuperscript{23}

Kierkegaard toys with the notion of subjectivity in the anxious glance, in the look one casts towards what one cannot rationally encapsulate yet that to which one is drawn nonetheless. And, further, from Heidegger:

Anxiety reveals the nothing. We ‘hover’ in anxiety. More precisely, anxiety leaves us hanging because it induces the slipping away of beings as a whole. This implies that we ourselves—we humans who are in being—in the midst of being slip away from ourselves … there is nothing to hold onto, pure Da-sein is all that is still there. Anxiety robs us of speech.\textsuperscript{24}

Vertigo’s source is contradictory: its dizziness is before one’s inability to speak and the inability to see the end of speech. It is our response to the inexpressible. Kierkegaard’s faintness is from the inexplicable abyss before the subjectivity of one’s faith and Heidegger’s is in the anxious moment when Being and nothing become incomprehensibly synonymous. Lyotard likewise links the experience of the unsteady self to silence spoken endlessly in the face of the vertiginous, inexpressible event [\textit{arrive-t-il} and \textit{Ereignis}].\textsuperscript{25} The witness stands dizzy before the abyss of the inexpressible that is


\textsuperscript{24} Heidegger, \textit{What is Metaphysics?}, collected in \textit{Basic Writings}, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 93-110, 101. Further: “Anxiety robs us of speech. Because beings as a whole slip away, so that just the nothing crowds round, in the face of anxiety all utterance of the ‘is’ falls silent. That in the malaise of anxiety we often try to shatter the vacant stillness with compulsive talk only proves the presence of the nothing” (\textit{Ibid.}).

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Arrive-t-il} translates \textit{Ereignis}, which is infamously nebulous yet central to Heidegger’s thought and variously translated as the occurrence, presencing, enowning, appropriation, or, awkwardly, the “propriating,” to endeavor an allusion to “proprietary” or echo the French \textit{propre} (own) in order to incorporate the sense of ownness born from the \textit{eigen} into the idea of an event. \textit{Ereignis} refuses to be a straightforward noun for both Heidegger and Lyotard; instead, it is both a site and an activity intimately related to Being and language. “… the human is indeed in its essence linguistic. The word ‘linguistic’ as it is here used means: having taken place (\textit{ereignet}) out of the speaking of language. What has thus taken place (\textit{das so Ereignete}), the essential being of man, has been brought into its own (\textit{Eigenes}) by language so that it remains given over or appropriated (\textit{übereignet}) to the essential nature of language” (Heidegger, \textit{Unterwegs zur Sprache}, quoted in John D. Caputo, \textit{The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought} (New
the paradoxical site of her incapacity to testify and her incapacity to cease her testimony
and her illegitimacy because she lives and her illegitimacy causing her loss of
subjectivity. Before we encounter Lyotard’s untying of these knots, we must understand
how they tie together the witness’ being with her speaking. This elucidation is best
conducted through Lyotard’s source, Martin Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology.

1.3. Heidegger’s Silence: the Synthesis of Language and Being

Lyotard’s essay “Touches,” notes: “I would like to call an
event the face to face with nothingness,” and, “thus, to encounter an event is like bordering on nothingness”
(Jean-François Lyotard, “Touches,” within Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event (New York: Columbia
In keeping silent, authentic being-one’s-self does not keep on saying ‘I,’ but rather ‘is’
in reticence the thrown being that it can authentically be”
—Heidegger, Being and Time.26

Lytotard writes coyly of the equation of being and language; his discussion of the
conditionalized status of the witness who does not speak alludes to the assimilation of
being and language so as to underline the moral necessity of easing the differend that
keeps the witness silenced. Yet, Lyotard does not wholly and explicitly affirm this
equation of Being and language, which he understands as a problematic correlation in
Martin Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology. Instead, he entertain’s the equation as he
also works through and beyond it. However, despite his legitimate concern over
Heidegger’s synthesis of language and Being, when he ultimately rejects the union, does
he not also foreclose a possibility by which the witness could reclaim her existence:
through a silence that shelters her, rather than condemns and conditionalizes? This
silence would be one that holds open the meaning of Being as possibility: “we are an
uninterpreted sign.”27 Before turning to Lyotard’s critique of silence as the witness’
shelter, it is profitable to expound Heidegger’s equation of Being and language.

Heidegger begins his masterwork Being and Time by rehearsing the prejudices we
hold against re-raising the question “what is Being?” While it seems the most apparent
concept, he reveals repeatedly throughout the book our incessant inability to define that
elusiveness that is Being. This reveals the paradoxical reality that we are at home in
language in that there is nothing closer to our who, our what, our is-ness than language


playing off of Hölderlin’s poem “Mnemosyne:” “We are a sign that is not read.”
for Heidegger all the while the expression of our Being remains difficult to articulate.

*Being and Time* establishes the intimate connection between Being and language by defining the one by the other:

In the ordinary and also the philosophical ‘definition,’ Dasein, that is, the Being of man, is delineated as *zoon logon echon*, that creature whose Being is essentially determined by its being able to speak. *Legein* [discoursing] … is the guideline for arriving at the structures of Being of the beings we encounter in discourse and discussion.28

Da-sein, the being who asks about its own Being, further interconnects Being and the ability to speak by the notable reliance on *logos* as speech, word, reasoning and as our ground, that from which we come. *Logos* is expression and origin. This insight into *logos* concerns both content and its form; as content, it is our ground, as form it is our method by which we come to understand this ground.29 The primary theoretical circularity is between Being and language, yet another circle is *logos* as both that from which we come and that by which we come to know ourselves. *Logos*, then, is the primordial locus of truth (where truth is not an absolute adequation of a judgment with a state of affairs) and it is its own procession. Using *logos* as a means of return to itself as origin means that truth is an allusion towards its hidden essence, which Heidegger

---

28 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Op. Cit., Int., §6. *Legein* may be translated as “to deliberate” or “consider,” but its linkage with *logos* and *apophainesthai*, discussed below, renders it more properly understood as the activity of discourse between beings. In later writings, Da-sein is hyphenated to emphasize its own etymology as “Being there.”

29 The phenomenon that is Being as an appearance (i.e., as the manifest that may be a seeming) is undertaken through *logos*. Literally, the Greek *logos* is “speech,” but Heidegger’s etymology argues: “*Logos* is ‘translated,’ and that always means interpreted, as reason, judgment, concept, definition, ground, relation. But how can ‘speech’ be so susceptible of modification that *logos* means all the things mentioned, and indeed in scholarly usage?” (*Ibid.*, Int. II, §7b, 32.) Instead, he argues, *logos* is speech as *apophainesthai*, as the making manifest what one is talking about in speech, either for oneself or for those with whom one wishes to communicate (Heidegger cites Aristotle’s explication of *apophainesthai* (appearing, bringing to light, presencing) in *De interpretazione*, chs. 1-6, *Metaphysics*, VII.4, and *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII). This “making manifest,” or letting something be seen, is the fundamental sense of *logos*, for Heidegger, and occurs before anything gets said; it is the very condition without which nothing could be said. *Logos*, then, is the intelligibility that makes it possible to express what has been made manifest in the *phainomenon*. 
expresses as a saying without saying. Uncovering the truth itself by the methodological process of coming to know ourselves truly through language is simultaneously a covering over of ourselves with language because the means of disrobing is through robes.

Heidegger’s definition of Being is parallel to his project’s conjunction of ontology and phenomenology. Ontology is the endeavor to explain Being so as to make the Being of beings appear while phenomenology’s endeavor is to let that which shows itself be seen. Thus, Heidegger’s phenomenological-ontology is the science of the Being of entities that uncovers the meaning of Being by uncovering the basic structures of Da-sein (that being whose own Being is a question for it). Therefore, Heidegger cannot help but return to this equation of language and Being as he conducts his philosophical questioning. The conjunction is most explicitly seen later in *Being and Time* when language is named as a mode of Being of Da-sein, that is, as one of the four existentialia, or basic structures of “Being-in as Such:” attunement, understanding, discourse, and entanglement. The first mode is attunement, the mood in which Da-sein always already finds itself, the awareness of our thrownness, facticity, and Angst. The second is understanding, wherein Da-sein exists for possibilities of being that are not yet actual through projection that presses forward to these possibilities and interpretation that sees them in advance. Third, is discourse, of which he initially says little and casts the impression of language as something negative and only belonging to the fourth mode.

---

30 Phenomenology, etymologically as the conjunction of phainomenon and logos, is the pursuit to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself. This self-showing of the phenomena, Being, is united with the “letting be seen,” the uncovering and covering over by logos, language.

31 The Second Division’s discussion of “Temporality and Everydayness” revises these existentialia as: Understanding, Attunement, Falling Prey, and Discourse.
Eventually, however, he reveals discourse’s ultimate importance as the expression of meaning and articulation of the world that organizes attunement and understanding:

The fact that language only now becomes thematic should indicate that this phenomenon has its roots in the existential constitution of the disclosedness of Da-sein. … Discourse is existentially equiprimordial with attunement and understanding. Intelligibility is also always already articulated before its appropriative interpretation. Discourse is the articulation of intelligibility.\footnote{Ibid. I, V, §34, 160-1.}

The last mode of being is entanglement, which is similar to intersubjectivity (the “being-with” of Da-sein), but differs by emphasizing the potentiality of being trapped by the “They.” Entangled with the “They,” language is idle chatter as opposed to being the ontological root of Being. This distinction of language as being both an essential structure of Da-sein and a trap that snares Being within the ontic, everyday realm of beings is crucial and foreshadows the importance of Heidegger’s “call of conscience,” which is the best explication of the positive role of silence.

The call of conscience is the primordial call of Being to Being that is discourse, yet says nothing. This call reveals the structure of discourse as essential and awakened by silence; for discourse is to be more than an “idle talk” of the “They” that entangles Da-sein in ontic everydayness: “The call introduces the fact of constantly being-guilty and thus brings the self back from the loud idle chatter of the they’s common sense.”\footnote{Ibid., 296.}

The call takes us from language as chatter to language as our primordial root. He describes this essential form of language as having the character of “reticence,” which seems equally as negative as being called chatter, but ultimately is shown to be an
honorific form of language as silence.\(^{34}\) It is an understanding of discourse akin to the apophantic interpretation of *logos* that is the speech that may be saying (meaning) what it is not saying. Casting this lack as an openness, Heidegger says, “we characterized silence as an essential possibility of a discourse.”\(^{35}\) Therefore, the Da-sein open to the call of conscience exists in discourse as one who “takes the words away from the commonsense idle chatter of the they.”\(^{36}\) Through the call of conscience, that silent speaking of Being to Being, the lack of language brings us back to an awareness of our own Being as language.\(^{37}\) This is a silence that does not murder our subjectivity, but, rather, calls our awareness precisely back to it.

Heidegger turns to discourse as silence while being keenly aware of the dangerous tendencies of language to misrepresent that which it seeks to express. In a later work written as a dialogue with a Japanese scholar, he writes, “… I now see still more clearly the danger that the language of our dialogue might constantly destroy the possibility of saying that of which we are speaking.”\(^{38}\) This danger is all the more acute when

---

\(^{34}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{35}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{36}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{37}\) The links between Being and language in *Being and Time* are still not as explicitly and radically conjoined as in his later works, as revealed by his later reflection on the text, marginally appended by *Being and Time*’s discussion of Da-sein’s familiarity with the worldliness of the world that grounds the possibility of disclosing significations through understanding and interpreting that themselves ground the possibility of language. The note simply reads: “Untrue. Language is not imposed, but is the primordial essence of truth as there (Da)” (*Ibid.*, 87 and note beneath the text). The text grounds language’s origin in Da-sein while the note grounds language as the originary ground of Da-sein. In his latter works, the primacy of language and its proprietary hold of Being can be seen in the affirmation in the beginning of “On the Way to Language” that our essence is language, or the pronouncement in his essay “What Calls for Thinking?” that “we are an uninterpreted sign” (Heidegger, “On the Way to Language,” collected in *Basic Writings, Op. Cit.*, 397-426, 397 and Heidegger, “What Calls for Thinking?,” *Op. Cit.*, 382, respectively).

language is equated with Being itself. When we try to speak about things-in-themselves, those concepts that repel ostensive definition, we often falsify the thing itself.\textsuperscript{39}

Heidegger names this falsification “metaphysics.” This charge is as accusation of the misrepresentation of Being as something Being is not. This charge surfaces frequently: in \textit{Being and Time} we are all guilty of metaphysics because of our deep-seated prejudices against rethinking the question of Being that presume it to be the most obvious of ideas. In his “Letter on Humanism,” existentialism in general and Jean-Paul Sartre in particular are charged with metaphysics for naming Being as human beings. In Heidegger’s \textit{Nietzsche} volumes, Nietzsche is charged (albeit with a tone of praise) with being the greatest of metaphysicians for naming Being as will to power. The problem motivating Heidegger’s frequent accusations is that to posit X is Y (for example, that Being is beings or will) is to commit a logical falsity; either X is X, Being is Being, or else the equation is incorrect. Heidegger is not concerned with the validity of the law of non-contradiction. His concern, rather, is the misidentification of the essence of Being as its instantiation, similar to the identification of a dog as a poodle; while true and productive in a narrative describing Being or dogs, it does not name what each is in itself. Heidegger wishes to direct our attention to the truth of the logical circle of “Being is

\textsuperscript{39} Heidegger’s expression of concern mirrors Descartes’: “But meanwhile I marvel at how prone my mind is to errors. For although I am considering these things within myself silently and without words, nevertheless I seize upon words themselves and I am nearly deceived by the ways in which people commonly speak” (René Descartes, \textit{Meditations on First Philosophy}, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), M. II, 31-2). Only one meditation later, we find expression of the consequence of this danger: material falsity. Until his third, error seemed only to threaten us when we made judgments; yet, now, Descartes reveals that danger also lurks within ideas themselves when they appear to grant existence to what is nonexistent. For example, if I define heat as the privation of cold, I ascribe more reality to cold than to the heat: I grant the cold existence and define heat as its privation. From this stance, then, it is materially false to form the idea of heat as an agitation of the soul or as a consequence of the sun because any such idea would be an attribution of qualities to that which exists only as a negation of plenitude and is not capable of having such properties in itself (Ibid., M. III, 43-4). Descartes’ conception of “material falsity” is remarkably akin to Heidegger’s conception of “metaphysics.”
Being” in order to seek the nature of and how we know what we cannot legitimately name otherwise.

This search for a way of expressing this circularity so as to give knowledge is the essential question for the witness and, as we will see, for Pseudo-Dionysius when he asks how to name God himself without misnaming Him as His creations. Pseudo-Dionysius will ultimately adopt a stutter affirming and denying the names of God, which is not entirely distinct from Heidegger’s recognition of how “is,” as a conjugation of the verb “to be,” renders his formulation of Being is Being as a redundancy: Being being Being. The simplicity and severity of this aim to speak beyond a stutter haunts Heidegger. His writings experiment with writing Being as the unfinished phrase “Being is …” and as Being. Neither ultimately satisfies him and perhaps explains his particular curiosity later in his life in the symbolic languages as opposed to alphabetic-grammatical ones witnessed in his interest in Japanese and his attempt at a translation of the Chinese classic the Tao Te Ching. Perhaps the problem was not with the definition of Being itself, but with the act of defining, with the language in which we think Being. This consideration brings us to Lyotard’s concern with the inherent deception in testimonial narrative.

There is ample evidence for Heidegger’s interest in and involvement with Asian thought. His writings include direct references to Eastern Asian Languages, the Tao, and Lao Tzu in “The Question of Being,” Identity and Difference, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); “The Nature of Language” in On the Way to Language, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1982); “Science and Reflection” in the Question Concerning Technology, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Harper Torchbooks, 1977). “From a Conversation of Language,” footnoted in Existence and Being, trans. Werner Bock (New York: Henry Regnery Company, 1949) references §XL of Lao Tzu’s Tao Te Ching. Further, there is documentation that by 1930 Heidegger read Karl Jasper’s translation of the Chuang Tzu and was already acquainted his translation of the Tao Te Ching. In the late 1940’s-1950’s Heidegger was in collaboration with Hsiao on his own translation of that latter work (however, it is said that Hsiao was ambivalent about the project, afraid that Heidegger’s interpretations would diverge too greatly from the text). Heidegger’s philosophical interests are highly compatible with Asian thought. Chinese, for example, could supplement Heidegger’s critique of “ontotheology” (i.e., an ontological-theological-logic) through its lack of a concrete subject-object distinction (no onto-), lack of a linguistic metaphysics (no theo-), and lack of a foundation in an Aristotelian logic (no logic) that he deduced in the Greek and Latin foundations of the European languages.
1.4. Lyotard on Testimonial Narrative

The citation of the testimony from the Nuremberg Trials, above, revealed that Otto Ohlendorf, the SS officer, was a better witness than Marie Claude-Valliant-Couturier, who had been detained in a concentration camp. Ohlendorf’s testimony recorded that he was present, he saw, added to, was given, and took written records at the camps in the role of an official witness. The analysis of this testimony revealed that it was not his deposition’s empiricism that made it superior to the victim’s, but that it formed a logical narrative of events in the idiom held to be valid eye witnessing by the courts, that is, held to be truth. Within this juridical logic, the victim’s testimony was evidence only of her detention (thus proving the camps to be concentration camps) and not of her death (thus inconclusive about the camps being death camps). Thus, the sworn evidence of the holocaust victim did not prove to be evidence against the historical revisionists like Faurisson who argued that there was no proof of the existence of Nazi gas chambers.

Leaving aside the critique of the narrowness of this idiom of the revisionists and the tribunal, Lyotard takes up the problem of how to let the victim bear witness to the horror of the death camps even while she is not dead, as his most explicit illustration of a differend wherein: “… the plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes for that reason a victim” (§12). Lyotard takes up this problem of differends because it is a most fundamental conflict of intelligibility. He uses it to reveal that reality itself cannot be represented rationally because it overflows with singular events that surpass their containment in logical narration. The inability to express one’s experiences, then,
becomes a relatively universal and common occurrence that we simply, most often, do not take the time to explore philosophically.

Testimony, within the idiom of the tribunal, relies upon the singular event being logically delineated and requires a non-contradicting, linear recount in order for it, and, by extension, its event, to be judged as true. This form of linguistic construction is the narrative. The narrative plays a crucial and recurrent role in Lyotard’s philosophy; in addition to being the epistemological and ethical problematic of *The Differend*, it is also the concept that permits the differentiation between the modern and postmodern periods, indicating his hallmark elaboration of what is postmodernism. To better understand narrative’s role in testimony, I will briefly review its appearance in other contexts.

Just as the tribunal accepts logically consistent narrative as more truthful than the witness’ testimony, Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* shows how scientific discourse rejects literary narrative as inconsistent and illogical. The debate between the languages of the scientist and author reveals why juridical logic cannot understand the victim so long as we take note that testimony will start opposed to and become parallel (although not identical) to narrative in this delineation as it is critiqued as illogical by the scientific genre of discourse. Lyotard begins by elaborating narrative in the same way as successful testimony: it is essentially theatrical, even when borrowed for objective report, because it requires an addressor who has authority to tell the tale, a listener with the authority to hear the tale, and a third party of whom or about which the narrative concerns. The narrative speaks to and of the society within which it occurs; the players, recitation, and production actualize the narrative simultaneously as the narrative is their

---

own actualization. In contrast and incommensurate with narrative is the language of the post-industrial sciences. The scientific discourse proceeds by the denotative statement and actively rejects any other language game (genre of language). Unlike narrative, it neither forges nor reflects the social bond even while it contributes to it by founding many modern institutions and values. Scientific language, then, neither elevates nor even includes the other; instead, it remains superior to the speaker, claiming an objectivity divorced from the social and historical. Revealing, now, how scientific language is akin to the successful tribunal narrative, both refuse to appreciate their own interrelation with other language games:

[Narrative] approaches such [scientific] discourse primarily as a variant in the family of narrative cultures. The opposite is not true. The scientist questions the validity of narrative statements and concludes that they are never subject to argumentation or proof. He classifies them as belonging to a different mentality: savage, primitive, underdeveloped … Narratives are fables, myths, legends …

Juridically accepted narrative, like science, requires you to speak its language or else it judges you as incapable or unwilling to report the truth. Like the scientist, the judge and jury are confounded by a rational animal’s incapacity to be rational by the standards of the model of scientific reason.

Another elaboration of narrative, within Lyotard’s late lecture entitled “Clouds,” highlights Lyotard’s critique of the rigidity of testimonial narrative and encourages an

---

42 Ibid., §6, p. 18-23.

43 “Language game” is a concept Lyotard borrows repeatedly though his oeuvre from Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*; this theoretical inheritance will be elaborated in chapter two.

understanding of a more truthful account of reality.45 Within the essay, he interrupts his recounting of his own life narrative with the delineation of the two sides of what he terms “narratology.” Representing one side is the 17th century’s protector of the generative complexity of ancient narrative, Nicolas Boileau, who “defended the beautiful disorder permitted by the ‘rule of no rules,’” and representing the other side is the lover of scientific rationality, Charles Perrault, who, “in the name of the modern, is obviously for order and definite beginnings, middles, and ends.”46 These two sides roughly map onto a distinction between a reconsidered form of an accommodating narrative and scientific language. Lyotard critiques the inflexibility of scientific discourse while also critiquing the presumption of linearity of narration, pointing out how “any narrative whatsoever begins in the middle of things and that its so called ‘end’ is an arbitrary cut in the infinite sequence of data …”47 The force of Lyotard’s critiques demands a more flexible consideration of testimonial truth-determinations. His best expression of this is when he likens thoughts to clouds:

> The periphery of thoughts is as immeasurable as the fractal lines … Thoughts never stop changing their location one with the other. When you feel like you have penetrated far into their intimacy in analyzing either their so-called structure or genealogy or even post-structure, it is actually too late or too soon. One cloud casts its shadow on another, the shape of clouds varies with the angle from which they are approached.48

45 Jean-François Lyotard, “Clouds,” in Peregrinations, Op. Cit., 1-15. “Clouds are invoked as a metaphor for thoughts so as to highlight the insubstantiality of thinking in relation to the reality that is to be conceived” (Gary Browning, Lyotard and the End of Grand Narratives (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 6).

46 Lyotard, “Clouds,” Op. Cit., 2. Boileau (1636-1711), French poet and critic, sharply fashioned his reflections against the French author Charles Perrault’s (1628-1703) widely repeated theory of the superiority of the moderns over the ancients (widely, so as to be known as the “Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes” between the two men and followed by the Académie française in the early 1690’s).

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., 5. Compare this shape-shifting with how Lyotard elaborates his conception of every thought being a rethinking by comparison to the Freudian Nachträglich: “… the way the first offense touches our mind.
As elusive as accumulations of water vapor, thoughts resist delineation. An artist may paint the most stunning cloud, but that representation is not what I look up, now, and see. When I offer my testimony, I can trace the boundaries of the event, but these curves are deceptive. They will be real outlines, but not real testimony (because they did not capture the actual outlines of the actual cloud and what is all that is an actual cloud, anyway?). I cannot capture the single event and represent it truthfully. Like Heidegger feared in his discussion with his Japanese friend, our language will misrepresent our intended object.

This inability to encapsulate, within either scientific discourse or linear narrative, the singular event may be one of the factors that gave the young Lyotard pause when he was asked to write an essay giving an account of life as someone born in 1925. The essay demanded him to speak on behalf of his generation, and he found that, trying to speak with a universal voice, he could only offer truthful contradictions:

We will come out of war, the Twentieth Century’s most concrete product, with a monstrous poverty of thought and morals. We are twenty years old when the camps disgorge that which they have had neither the time nor the appetite to digest. Those hollow faces plague our thinking …

Lyotard, encapsulates the we (all who were born in 1925) as incongruity: we will come out of war the most concrete yet utterly impoverished generation; we will be most rooted in the real, brought down from metaphysical peaks to be fully aware of the horror that had taken place, but, also, we will be unable to respond, we will be “a monstrous poverty too soon and the second too late, so that the first time is like a thought not yet thought while the second time is like a not-thought to be thought later” (Ibid., 9).

of thought.”

We, like the tribunal, do not want narrative contradictions. We want a narrative obedient to Socrates’ instruction to Phaedrus: one that is like a living being with a distinguishable head, body, and tail. The conflict or the differend within testimonial narrative, however, is that the real often refuses to unfold like a proper argument and have an apodictic beginning, middle, and end or be a causal chain.

A striking instance of the confounding between linearity and truth can be found in Lyotard’s Cashinahua Notice within his last chapter of *The Differend*. The Cashinahua, a native population settled in both Peru and Brazil, employ a strict and fixed formula by which to begin and end their *miyoi*, their traditional narratives. This formula, as quoted from André-Marcel d’Ans, begins with: “Here is the story of …, as I’ve always heard it told. I am going to tell it to you in my turn, listen to it” (p. 152)! Lyotard notes that the narrator’s declaration of *always* having heard the tale singularizes his authority as it universalizes his history:

If every narrator has always declared this, then the story will have been reported with no discontinuity since the time of the Ancients, who were the first narrators as well as the heroes. There would be no gap, therefore, between the current narrator and the Ancients, except in principle a chronological one (p. 154).

The singularity of a narrator telling the tale, a singular event, universalizes their collective history. The tale’s inheritance grants authority as it demands authority to be telling it: this question of right is circular while the telling of the tale itself cements Cashinahua reality into a single linear narrative. We want our myths, histories, and witness’ testimony, likewise, to grant the authority of the one who can tell it and whose telling unfolds it into a perfect, single genealogical line of narrative inheritance.

50 Ibid.

The danger of making the singular occurrence, be it the death camp, the self, a first kiss, or God, follow such a restrictive narrative is that it imposes fiction over the fragments of fact: it must invent the cuts, the order of the scenes, label one the beginning and one the end. This means, however, that the testimony that the witness could offer that would be found comprehensible to the tribunal would be a narrative that is as much fiction as it is fact. This undercuts our demand that testimony be sworn evidence of the truth. Is there any way, then, for the victim not only to bear witness to what the tribunal declares inexpressible in a way to render it comprehensible, but also to do so truthfully?

If the witness will be comprehensible only by a fictionalization of the truth, can she not be more honest by remaining silent so long as we accept her silence to not eliminate her Being? Thus, we return to the question of whether Lyotard’s reluctance to accept Heidegger’s equation of Being and language is too hasty. Heidegger revealed that the silent being stands as “an uninterpreted sign.” So long as that sign is, even if it is unread, uninterpreted, even silent, it still is: the sign points to Being. In this manner, the witness, then, could remain a witness when silent; with her silence she could bare truthful witness. Lyotard seems to accepts this movement when he analytically reduces testimony down to its linguistic components to determine that phrases call forth other phrases, even the phrase of silence, that the event of a phrase points toward the serial nature of phrases and referents. As Heidegger’s silence always points back to Being,

---


53 “Phrase” is broadly conceived by Lyotard, for example: “It’s daybreak; Give me the lighter; Was she there? … ax^2+bx+c=0; Ouch! … This is not a phrase; Here are some phrases” (§109). Each calls for its situation and a response; it is daybreak asks us to confirm or deny it as the case or acknowledge its beauty or begrudge its coming. He also offers the nonlinguistic: a “raised tail of a cat” (§123) is a phrase, it calls to us to think of getting her dinner, information about felines, about the itch of a cat scratch; yet, he reminds us to not misunderstand him, for a phrase is not an object. The object, or referent, is called a phrase-type; it is that which is referred to by the phrase as a case, an occurrence, the phrase-event.
there is, likewise for Lyotard, no isolated phrase. Any one phrase always is; it calls to us to link it with something preceding it, “[a] phrase presents at least one universe …” (§111). It calls to us to think about the relations between, before, and after the instant of the phrase that constitute its meaning. Heidegger’s silence calls to conscience as Lyotard’s phrase demands us to respond. Heidegger’s silence meaningfully says nothing, thus justifying the possibility for Lyotard’s silent witness to meaningfully be her own testimony.

Despite these initial correlations between Lyotard and Heidegger’s thought, there are two damning divergences between them. First, Lyotard accepts this correlation of language and Being only ontically, not ontologically. When Lyotard asks: “Could the presentation entailed by a phrase be called Being?” (§113), he answers that it is not Being but only a mere being that is equated with language the moment Being calls, speaks: “But it [Being] is one presentation, or what in a phrase-case is the case. Being would be a case, an occurrence, the ‘fact’ that happens to ‘fall,’ that it ‘comes running’ … Not Being, but one being …” (§113). Essentially, Lyotard proposes that Being is a phrase, only, we must define Being, against Heidegger, as a being: “… Being can be presented, [only] as an existent” (§114). For Heidegger, this would be a metaphysical mistake akin to that of humanism’s, making Dasein into individual, specific existents. And, for Lyotard, the inherent problem here is not metaphysics, but that the singular being, like the singular event, overflows all possible encapsulation, thus, would only be a phrase and not the truthful testimony.

The second divergence from Heidegger begins with Lyotard’s acceptance of the event of Being, which is the phrase as Ereignis, yet, concludes forbidding silence as the
witness’ salvation. “The phrase considered as occurrence [Ereignis] escapes the logical paradoxes that self-referential propositions give rise to” (§99). The phrase, for Lyotard, is parallel to the presencing and withdrawing of the meaning of language and Being, proposed by Heidegger, in that it embodies an essential, paradoxical movement. Like the one called by Being to reflect on one’s ownmost potentiality of Being, Lyotard is working out the “unknown idiom” by which the victim can give testimony to the paradox of the wrong (§135). A phrase that can be and not be at once, like Ereignis, may be a phrase that will stand for her testimony.

The victim’s testimony must withstand “the test of universal doubt” (§94). And the phrase can, Lyotard tells us, because it is, like Ereignis, something and no one thing. By nature, the phrase is serial; it calls to us to link it with something preceding it, “[a] phrase presents at least one universe …” (§111). And it is always more than what it is; it calls to us to think about the relations between, before, and after the instant of the phrase. Further, it must always be taken as certain fact that there is at least one phrase; any argument against this must presuppose it, must employ a phrase to deny the existence of a phrase (§99). In this way, then, Ereignis as phrase may rescue the victim by permitting her a way to indicate truthfully that which can only be logical contradiction when put into legal testimony.

The phrase permits the victim a way outside of this bind; it permits a way to grant the witness ecstasy, which had appeared to be forbidden when Lyotard refused the phrase to be read as a Heideggerian ontological declaration. Heidegger defines Da-sein as ecstasy, a standing outside of herself; but, when he then permits an equation between Being and language, Da-sein is called to reflect upon herself through silence. This
activity of Being is not ecstatic, but becomes a shelter within silence: “… language … [is] the house of Being” and “… human being consists in dwelling …”54 Prohibited ecstasy, Heidegger’s Ereignis does not permit the witness to the death camp to stand outside of her (living) self so as to truthfully proffer testimony (to her intended death). But, when Lyotard’s interpretation of the phrase as Ereignis refuses the ontological, it permits her an escape from a shelter of silence and permits her ecstasy. Lyotard’s formulation renders the call, not a silent one from Being that provokes repose, but one from beings who call for our response.

The witness logically forbidden testimony found herself in a state where “… one is oneself unreal or conditional as long as one has not spoken …” (§15). This state suggests that the wrong that the tribunal (here, historical revisionists) inflicts upon her is making silencing into ontological homicide. This equation could be accounted for by exploring the linkage and equation that Heidegger permits between language and Being. But, for Heidegger, honest reflection, the activity of Being, is called forth when one reposes into silence; silence, then, is not victimization. Lyotard is a careful yet critical reader of Heidegger and employs his aide while evading this conclusion. He will permit the relation between Being and language by transposing Heidegger’s reading of Ereignis as the call of conscious into the call to response by and to the phrase. However, he refuses this linkage between Being and language to be between the ontological and linguistic; instead, he shows it is within ontic, everyday beings and language.

This divergence that permits Heidegger silence as salvation refuses it for Lyotard. For Heidegger, silence is provocative of a call parallel to how Ereignis silently provokes

beings to uncover the true structures of Being, to read the sign that points to Being. For
Lyotard, the witness must speak; silence is no redemption before an accuser, a judge and
jury, an audience who judges reality based upon testimony and demonstrable evidence.
For Lyotard, the witness must find a way to speak a speech that lets her stand outside of
herself (as living) in such a way to grant her testimony (of death) legitimacy. And this is
why Lyotard must rescue Da-sein as ecstasy at once with his movement to the ontic
realm. If the witness can achieve ecstasy in her testimony, then her phrases can embody
the sensual legitimacy that the tribunal accorded as proper to eye witnessing, which no
dead body could do and which is the basis of truthful testimony. Lyotard’s ecstasy pulled
away before the Heidegger’s conclusion of a shelter within silence will be elaborated
with the assistance of Pseudo-Dionysius’ thought. This argument, however, cannot be
broached without a better elaboration of ecstasy itself and an introduction to Pseudo-
Dionysius.

Ecstasy, ekstasis, is from the Greek for “trance” or “distraction” (existanai
phrenon, to drive out of one’s mind). It is derived from the prefix ex-, out or outside, and
the verb -stasis, to stand. Ecstasy, etymologically, is a rapture that is a standing outside
of oneself. It has variously been designated emotively as a fearful state, a stupor, as utter
happiness, and as a supremely good feeling.55 Ecstasy calls to mind love, the sublime,
and God. It calls forth a connection to love by its intonation of Socrates’ definition of
desire, notably in the Symposium, as an intentionality directed out and towards something
that one personally lacks. It is an intense yearning forth for some elusive thing. It calls
forth a parallel to the Kantian sublime by provoking the sensuous immediacy of both fear
and awe through the qualitatively or quantitatively overwhelming that yields an utterly

55 The contrast is to enstasis, a standing within oneself that can be understood as interiorized contemplation.
blissful, self-promotive victory as reason conquers the fear by conquering the incomprehensibility. Finally, ecstasy calls forth a comparison to the religious dimension by being the state of the mystic drawn outside of himself by either epistemological or emotive disconnect when drawn up to union by and with God.56

Saint Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica*, Treatise on Human Acts, otherwise called the “treatise on the passions,” explores the relation between ecstasy and love in Question 28, article three, “Of the Effects of Love.”57 Citing the authority of Dionysius the Areopagite and quoting his *Divine Names*, “the Divine love produces ecstasy … [and] God himself suffered ecstasy through love,” Aquinas counters three objections to affirm the intimate relation between love and ecstasy so that every love is a cause of ecstasy.58 He writes, “to suffer ecstasy means to be placed outside oneself.” This suffering can afflict the apprehensive power or the appetitive power; thus, ecstasy can be of two ways. When it afflicts the power of apprehension, “a man is said to be placed outside himself, when he is placed outside the knowledge proper to him,” which is born from an uplifting movement. This ecstasy is “due to his being raised to a higher knowledge … inasmuch as he is placed outside the connatural apprehension of his sense and reason, when he is

56 Evelyn Underhill, an eminent scholar on the mystical experience, writes, “All mystics agree in regarding such ecstasy as an exceptionally favourable state; the one in which man’s spirit is caught up to the most immediate union with the divine. The word has become a synonym for joyous exaltation, for the inebriation of the Infinite” (Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002), 358). Stephen Gersh, on the founding possibility of knowing God for Pseudo-Dionysius, writes, “…. emanation is interpreted by Neoplatonists as an ‘ecstasy,’ a notion which recurs in much speculation of mediaeval and more recent times” (Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysius Tradition* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1978), 20).


raised up so as to comprehend things that surpass sense and reason.” The ecstasy 
afflicting the power of appetite, though, is born from a defiling movement, “due to his 
being cast down into a state of debasement … when he is overcome by violent passion or 
madness.” In this descent from oneself, “a man is said to suffer ecstasy, when that power 
is borne towards something else, so that it goes forth from itself as it were.”59

The two ecstasies born from love are caused by a divergence between a love that 
is indirect (dispositive) and one that is direct. The ecstasy that afflicts the apprehensive 
power is born from an indirect love “in so far … as love makes the lover dwell on the 
beloved … to dwell intently on one thing [that] draws the mind from other things.”60 The 
ecstasy that afflicts the appetitive power is born from a direct love that is either “by love 
of friendship, simply; by love of concupiscence not simply but in a restricted sense.”61 
This distinction of direct love may illustrate the schism between agape and eros that will 
be explored below. A simple, direct love is agape, like the love between friends and the 
love that most often surfaces in the Bible. The concupiscent love, eros, is considered to 
be restricted because:

the lover is carried out of himself, in a certain sense; in so far, namely, as 
not being satisfied with enjoying the good that he has, he seeks to enjoy 
something outside himself. But since he seeks to have this extrinsic good 
for himself, he does not go out from himself simply, and this movement 
remains finally within him.62

59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
Here, the movement of ecstasy is seen as a dramatic going outside of oneself and return back into oneself instead of a pure love constantly emanated outward “absolutely.”

This examination of Aquinas merges together the two common employments of ecstasy, mentioned above, love and religion. Pseudo-Dionysius will elaborate this merger while the argument will be made that his narrative, which seeks to name and thus know God, cannot be spoken without it. Pseudo-Dionysius’ testimony, then, is epistemologically ecstatic; Lyotard’s testimonial employment of ecstasy will be revealed in the following chapter to be primarily aesthetic. In this way, an interpretation of the Kantian sublime will be subsumed into the ecstatic merger of love and religion.

---

63 Ibid.
1.5. The Witness and Testimony in Pseudo-Dionysius

How then can we speak of the divine names?
How can we do this if the Transcendent surpasses all discourse and all knowledge,
if it abides beyond the reach of mind and of being, if it encompasses and circumscribes,
embraces and anticipates all things while itself eluding their grasp and escaping
from any perception, imagination, opinion, name, discourse, apprehension, or understanding?
How can we enter upon this undertaking if the Godhead is superior to being and is
unspeakable and unnameable?
—Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*. 64

“How then can we speak of the divine names?” asks the anonymous author we
give the name of Pseudo-Dionysius:

Many scripture writers will tell you that the divinity is not only invisible
and incomprehensible, but also ‘unsearchable and inscrutable,’ since there
is not a trace for anyone who would reach through into the hidden depths
of this infinity. And yet, on the other hand, the Good is not absolutely
incommunicable to everything (588C).

God exceeds human imagination and comprehension, yet history has recorded many
testimonies and recounts many calls to witness God. If God is unknowable, how is it that
we can name Him? We can only name Him by admitting that any name truthfully given
to God must embrace its own inherent paradox as an untruthfulness. This is the
undertaking of the self-named-Dionysius who radically reworks language, as he did his
own identity, to be able to speak to the unspeakable.

When our soul is enlightened by the love of God, Pseudo-Dionysius says, we can
concentrate through yearning alone on achieving a perfect divine union with Him, but
until this union, we cannot *positively* know God. We are only permitted scraps of
knowledge:

Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 47-131, 593A-B. All following citations will be parenthetical.
… we must not dare to resort to words or conceptions concerning the hidden divinity which transcends being, apart from what the sacred scriptures have divinely revealed. Since the unknowing of what is beyond being is something above and beyond speech, mind, or being itself, one should ascribe to it an understanding beyond being (588A).

Just as senses cannot grasp ideas and form cannot represent the formless, we cannot know what is beyond knowing in any other way than by troublesome indirection, analogy, suspicion, and these scraps of knowing collected here and there. We cling to these scraps in order to come closer to grasping the divine. We set our heart and minds to work assembling a collage of these fragments to make a picture, to give us a name by which we can know something about God. We strive to know by naming that which we desire.

“We now grasp these things in the best way we can, and as they come to us, wrapped in the sacred veils …” (592B). This intense desire and command to know God, to know that which exceeds our rational capacities, is well documented; the Scriptures tell us to speak the truth “not in the plausible words of human wisdom but in demonstration of the power granted by the Spirit” (585B).65

Beyond the Scripture writers, the history is rich with this paradox. Moses Maimonides, for example, explains the strength of this desire to know these “things (beyond that boundary) which are acknowledged to be inaccessible to human understanding … their minds are bent on comprehending such things, that is to say, they are moved by desire …”66 Julian of Norwich’s desire to know God, to be one of

---

65 1 Corinthians 2:4. Other Scriptural passages concerning the knowledge of God include: “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Christ Jesus” (2 Cor 4:6), “O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are his judgments, and how unsearchable his ways!” (Romans 11:33), “For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world, by wisdom, knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of our preaching, to save them that believe” (1 Cor 1:21).

“Christ’s lovers,” was so painfully intense that death would be relief; she writes, “here felt I truly that I loved Christ so much above myself that methought it had been a great ease to me to have died bodily.” The Cloud of Unknowing’s anonymous author reveals that “… all that you will find is a darkness, a sort of cloud of unknowing; you cannot tell what it is, except that you experience in your will a simple reaching out to God.”

Father Tugwell, in his preface to The Cloud of Unknowing, elaborates this sentiment more positively by declaring that “our minds are defeated when we try to draw close to God; only love can take the final step, drawing us into the dark yet dazzling mystery of God as he is in himself.”

We cannot comprehend the creation that defines our existence. We are unable to bear witness to God rationally, but the religious call is precisely to strive to this witnessing: “Look up now, feeble creature, and see what you are. What are you and how have you deserved to be called by our Lord?”

---

67 Julian of Norwich, A Shewing of God’s Love: The Shorter Version of “Sixteen Revelations of Divine Love,” ed. Anna Maria Reynolds (London: Sheed and Ward, 1974), 1-2 and 30, respectively. Little is known about Julian, even the authenticity of her name; she was probably born in the end of 1342 and experienced mystical visions at 30 years old as a Benedictine nun and recluse at the now-named St. Julian’s Church in Norwich. This desire, that she reports, to be His lover is supplemented by her desire to forge her relation to God as one of marriage. She reports that until the day she may be one with God she will not love, rest, or experience bliss, “… until I be so fastened unto him …” (Ibid., 10).

68 Anonymous, The Cloud of Unknowing, ed. James Walsh, S.J. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), ch. III, 120. He continues, “This darkness and cloud is always between you and your God, no matter what you do, and it prevents you from seeing him clearly by the light of understanding in your reason, and from experiencing him in sweetness of love in your affection. So set yourself to rest in this darkness as long as you can, always crying out after him whom you love.” The anonymous author is thought to have been a Carthusian hermit who rejected all attachment to bodily and worldly things. While he recognizes the importance of Church prayers, he drafted personal religious exercises wherein yearning for God is a condition requiring strict exercise. His desire is not for knowledge in and of itself, but for generating feeling: “… the desire for God, and the achievement of union with him insofar as it is possible in this life” (editor’s introduction to Julian of Norwich, A Shewing of God’s Love, Op. Cit., 17, 28-9).

69 Father Simon Tugwell, O.P., Preface, in Anonymous, The Cloud of Unknowing, Op. Cit., xiv. Also, see “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:8).

70 Ibid., ch. II, 117. Jean-Luc Marion eloquently expresses this dilemma in the start of his work God without Being: “Theology renders its author hypocritical in at least two ways. Hypocritical in the common sense: in pretending to speak of holy things … he cannot but find himself, to the point of vertigo, unworthy, impure—in a word, vile … He remains hypocritical in another, more paradoxical sense: if authenticity
to be worthy of being called to testify to that which exceeds our possible demonstration of evidence, Maimonides rejects the “impropriety of ascribing to God any positive attributes,” which would suggest some claim to knowledge. Julian seeks to affirm the impossible by embracing the suffering that she feels in her distance from God as a mimetic honoring of the suffering of Christ. The Cloud’s author does not embrace pain but the rigor of mental exercise as an honorific conditioning to be worthy of knowing He who cannot be known. These reverences, however, are tenuous if purported to be demonstrations of knowledge of God. Logic, like that of the court that rejected Lyotard’s witness, would likewise reject these sufferings that claim to be testimony that denies the capacity of testimony. It would reject the demonstration of pain as evidence, reject the witness who is now silent, yet reserves the right that he may one day be prepared to speak. For logic, if one knows that God is, then one can say that and what He is. Thus, these diverse attempts to bear witness to the ineffable are not solutions capable of speaking in the logic of the everyday. Pseudo-Dionysius’ exploration and address of this paradox both precedes and exceeds his fellow mystics’. He cannot give perfect testimony, but he can speak.

Pseudo-Dionysius’ confrontation with the problem of bearing witness to the indefinable renders his Divine Names a radical treatise, “… proved to be one of the most

(remembered with horror) consists in speaking of oneself, and in saying only that for which one can answer, no one, in a theological discourse, can, or should, pretend to it. For theology consists precisely in saying that for which only another can answer—the Other above all, the Christ who himself does not speak in his own name, but in the name of his Father” (Marion, God without Being, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), Envoi, 1-2).

pregnant texts in the medieval canon for philosophic conceptions and methods." His work is first guided by the instruction of 1 Corinthians 2:4, to speak the truth “not in the plausible words of human wisdom but in demonstration of the power granted by the Spirit” (585B). What the power behind their activity of writing revealed was a long list of attributes, scraps of knowledge naming the Divine as “invisible,” “incomprehensible,” “unsearchable and inscrutable,” “Life of the living, the being of beings, it is the Source and Cause of all life and all being, for out of its goodness it commands all things to be and keeps them going” (588C, 589C). What we know of Him is that we know only mere fragments of the whole of what is; this meager knowledge translates our testimony into a stutter. Pseudo-Dionysius’ testimony to the knowledge of the unknowable embodies a hyper-amplified desire directed to the creation of a method of speaking and rejecting these scraps of knowledge. Using Scripture as a guide, he collects attributes of God, in themselves insufficient to name that which is above all names, and pastes them together as a picture, once drawn then erased. This is Pseudo-Dionysius’ innovative balance of both the denial and affirmation of God’s nature born from the inherent contradiction of our knowledge of Him. This method is a ceaselessly active conjunction of cataphatic (affirmative) and apophatic (negative) theologies.

Cataphatic theology, in regards to the question of naming God, is the method employed by theologians to ascribe confirmatory names to God without equivocating them. This approach would be the most commonly recognized, setting out a positive

73 1 Corinthians 2:4.
74 Pseudo-Dionysius extracts Invisible from: Colossians 1:15, 1 Timothy 1:17, Hebrews 11:27 and Unsearchable and Inscrutable from: Romans 11:33.
elaboration of God, his nature, and his acts. Through this approach, one can write a narrative about God: God is omnipotent, He is omniscient, He is omnibenevolent. Employing this method does not equate the manner of existence between the name and God despite the grammatical suggestion by connecting the two through the verb “to be.” Instead, cataphatic theology purports that “God is good” in that he creates goodness; all creations must be first in the creator, thus, he is what he creates and what he creates is what he is without ontological equation. Our aim, though, is not to describe what God does, but what He is in and of Himself. Pseudo-Dionysius explains this transmutation of “is” and “creates” by affirming that we can call God the names of His creatures because He, the cause, pre-contains His effects, the creatures. All is in God before it is on Earth, thus it is truthful and correct to call God by the names of his creations, understood to be His processions (596D-97A).\textsuperscript{75}

This explanation is an appeal to the theological theory of emanation, which explains creation as the processions from God. “The metaphor of emanation is a prominent feature of Neoplatonic thought and described the way in which spiritual principles—for pagan writers the One, the henads, etc., for Christians God and his divine attributes—exercise causality.”\textsuperscript{76} Etymologically, emanation means to flow forth or stream, indicating how causality pours forth from God; in other words, it is the theory that all derived things proceed out of a more originary source.\textsuperscript{77} Like water, however, its course is more cyclic than one-directional. Within mystical theory, just as creation flows

\textsuperscript{75} “For Denys, we address God by giving him names: or, to be more precise, not by giving him names but by using the names that he has revealed” (Andrew Louth, \textit{Denys the Areopagite} (London: Continuum, 1989), 78).

\textsuperscript{76} Gersh, \textit{From Iamblichus to Eriugena, Op. Cit.}, 17. The Neoplatonists mentioned in the flowing discussion will be examined closely in chapter three of this present work.

\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Ibid.}, 18.
forth from God, the faithful can concentrate on this creation to trace it back to its origin. This theory will be carefully considered in chapter three; here, just one further aspect is of particular interest: how the process of procession from and reversion to an origin does not destroy the perfect unity of that origin. Its unity is preserved through understanding emanation as ecstasy.\(^{78}\)

Translating this movement from the divine to the temporal can help explicate the possibility held open for both Pseudo-Dionysius’ faithful and Lyotard’s witness for moving outside of herself while still being herself so as to testify to the union with God and death in life. Gersh explains the relation of ecstasy to emanation through the lynchpin of the Neoplatonist Proclus’ doctrine of potency, “… the connecting element between unity and being ‘for it is a procession of unity and an ecstasy towards being’ …”\(^{79}\) Gersh reveals how ecstasy is synonymous with emanation in all cases where ecstasy contextually signifies causality. This elaborates Damascius’ pronouncement that “an effect is said to remain in its cause inasmuch as ‘it does not stand aside [i.e., \textit{exstasis}] from the nature of the cause’ …”\(^{80}\) Pseudo-Dionysius employs this synonymy and links it with love. This further linkage provokes Gersh to note the motive and means of emanation: “Thus God, because of the superfluity of his benevolence, produces all

\(^{78}\) “Emanation is interpreted by Neoplatonists as an ‘ecstasy,’ a notion which recurs in much speculation of mediaeval and more recent times” (Gersh, \textit{From Iamblichus to Eriugena, Op. Cit.}, 20). Chapter three will elaborate how ecstasy, as Gersh notes, became an interest of Christian Neoplatonism.


creatures by means of his ‘ecstatic superessential power’ …”81 The linkage of ecstatic-emanation with love reveals the theoretical intent and support of Pseudo-Dionysius’ *Divine Names*. God’s excess of love is the ecstatically, creative over-pouring of love that produces all his loved and loving creatures. The theory of emanation justifies his use of cataphatic theology to ascribe, without logical equivocation, the names of what proceeds from God to God himself because God is the source from which all that is, comes to be. By employing the names of what is, then, for naming Him, Pseudo-Dionysius has revealed that to seek to know and reflect on these names of God is a method that permits us participation in the cycle of emanation. The method permits us ecstasy: a way leading outside of ourselves and returning (through knowledge instead of death) back to God. This, however, is only one half of the picture of Pseudo-Dionysius’ methodological attempt to name God.

In contrast to cataphatic theology’s positive attribution of names to God, Pseudo-Dionysius also employs apophatic theology, which denies that God is anything namable. This view affirms that God is *not* any of his beings or His beings’ attributes. This disjuncture of the equation permits God truthful transcendence over His creatures by being their cause. Negative theology, thus, says, “God is not alive,” “God is not love,” and that “God is not light,” because life, love, and light are things on our human level, so

81 *Ibid.* Gersh cites Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names*, 712B. After Pseudo-Dionysius, many Christian Neoplatonists neglect ecstasy in favor of divine will, thus, neglect emanation for willful creation, as Gersh explains, out of a “… sensitivity to the element of automation implicit in the unqualified emanation metaphor” (Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena, Op. Cit.*, 20). Gersh does not so easily side with this view of the absolute conflict between emanation and willful creation, ultimately, but strongly makes the case nonetheless. Several stages of his larger argument include how: the diffusion of causal potency sounds more automatic, thus negating the concept of divine will; emanation is from God whereas creation is *ex nihilo*; and emanation is eternal whereas creation is in time. The counter case is the reconciliation of emanation and creation by means of a historical review of thinkers who excuse the pantheistic tone of Pseudo-Dionysius by revealing the “bubbling” as nominative of divine will and so forth. Gersh concludes that the debates eventually diminish simply for favor of the Biblical version of creation (*Ibid.*, 21-3).
to speak, and not truthfully representative of God. McGinn expresses the difference between the two methods by saying, “cataphatic theology operates on the level of reason, while modes of apprehension that surpass reason are used in apophatic [theology]…”82 Pseudo-Dionysius plays with these two tones of knowledge often as key to knowing the unknowable. An elucidatory example can be drawn from his either fictional or lost Symbolic Theology, where the names for God proceed from the symbolic; he calls God by names like rock, sun, and hand.83 These names proceed from knowledge born from our sense perception and more clearly illustrate the metaphoric nature of all names. It is more easily understood that God is not a clod of dirt than it is that He is not love.

Even more radical, however, than calling God rock, crown, and eye, was calling God a straightforward contradiction. “The revolution that was to take place in the Christian Neoplatonism of the Pseudo-Dionysius was when both hypotheses were applied to the same Trinitarian God as negative and positive expressions of the single Creative Source.”84 Pseudo-Dionysius’ radical move is that he appends one theological method to the other in a hybrid but organic stutter: God is and God is not (817C-D). “Since the unknowing of what is beyond being is something above and beyond speech, mind, or being itself, one should ascribe to it an understanding beyond being” (588A).85 The result is a stutter that repeats and differentiates, that calls God “nameless and yet has the

---


83 Pseudo-Dionysius’ Symbolic Theology is presumed to be fictitious or may just be lost; he lets us know through references that it concerned itself with names for God taken from things we can sensibly perceive. Cf. Divine Names, Op. Cit., n.89.


85 “The God who is transcends everything by virtue of his power” (817C), thus, God is is supplemented with “He was nor. He will not be. He did not come to be. He is not in the midst of becoming. He will not come to be. No. He is not” (817D). An interesting invocation of His being beyond being can be found in Jean-Luc Marion’s God Without Being where it is used to summarize Heidegger’s theological stance and ground Marion’s critique (trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 76-8.
names of everything that is” (596C), “He is power insofar as he exceeds all power”
(889D), He is greatness and smallness, immovable and moved (909B). This appendage
of the negative to the affirmative is necessary in the attempt to describe the indescribable.
Pseudo-Dionysius reveals its necessity when he explains the movement of his
dichotomous method:

When we assert what is beyond every assertion, we must then proceed
from what is most akin to it, and as we do so we make the affirmation on
which everything else depends. But when we deny that which is beyond
every denial, we have to start by denying those qualities which differ most
from the goal we hope to attain.86

Every name must be given and taken from God and in this activity a hierarchy is revealed
of names more and less suited to Him. While the end is incomprehensible, naming He
who is beyond names, the means are analytically precise even as they create a
disconcerting stutter. This rigorous establishing and unsettling of knowledge is led by
two overwhelming desires: for God and to know God. Thus led, the faithful one employs
a path conceptually supported by the theory of emanation and whose cyclic narrative
imitates it. Stuttering an affirmation and negation of each name, he ascends from the
firmest ground of knowledge (God is), over slippery paths (God is yearning), over
abysses (God is not), and finally descends into pathlessness, the ultimate negation of all
affirmation and negation itself. This final descent to union is the negation of speaking the
names of God; it is silence. The sensible and intelligible feed off of one another until
both must be surpassed for this knowledge. Most interestingly, however, in his ascent
and descent to union with God, Pseudo-Dionysius enacts a clipping off of the pattern of
negation before he ever negates the potentially slippery slope of naming God as yearning.
Silence comes before he refuses God His most provocative name.

Plotinus had characterized procession and reversion as both an ontological expression about God and His creations and as an epistemological one. In addition to a description of creation, emanation was a way of understanding creation and the creator. But, as Plotinus reveals, it is not through knowledge alone that we step outside of ourselves and towards God: “Plotinus was a resolute intellectualist, but the profoundly erotic tone of Enn. 1.6 shows us that he did not think that knowing alone could bring the soul back to its source.”

The ecstasy through which we stutter names of God to try to express our understanding of God is motivated by our desire to merge with God. This pursuit, then, reveals itself to be epistemology that is based in the passions instead of one that sets knowledge against the passions.

This variation of the source of knowledge is indicated in Nicholas of Cusa’s interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius in his 1453 letter to the abbot of the monks in Tegernsee, as revealed in Roger J. Corless’ examination. Nicholas interprets Pseudo-

---

87 McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, Op. Cit., 47. His continuation foreshadows themes that will be very important in chapter three, below: “Even in Plato … *eros* was not so much a selfish desire for personal possession and enjoyment of the beautiful as a creative desire to beget beauty on the beloved. In Plato, however, because *eros* always involves a deficiency of some sort, it could not be ascribed to the divine world. In Plotinus, erotic love has an ambit both more cosmic and more transcendental” (Ibid.). I will take up the argument later that the deficiency of Plato’s *eros* does not prohibit its attribution to the divine.

88 The broader argument implicit in this analysis is pointed towards by Jean-Luc Marion’s comment that while philosophy is defined as the love of wisdom, our common understanding of this definition often “masks another, more radical meaning: philosophy defines itself as the ‘love of wisdom’ because it must in effect begin by loving before claiming to know” (Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 2).

89 Roger J. Corless, “Speaking of the Unspeakable: Negation as the Way in Nicholas of Cusa and Nagarjuna,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, Vol. 2, 1982, pp.107-117. The German Cardinal, Nicholas of Cusa, 1401-1464, wrote on the problem of the knowledge of God, developing a justification for knowing Him by the divinity granted to our human mind by our Creator. He also cites Pseudo-Dionysius in his writings, notably as support of his idea of sacred ignorance as our minimal yet truthful degree of understanding of God, see *De Docta Ignorantia*, I, chapter 17. In the second footnote to the introduction of his translation of this work, Dr. Jasper Hopkins chronicles the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius on Nicholas of Cusa: “In Ap. 12:19-22 [Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae] Nicholas denies that he received the idea of learned ignorance from (Pseudo-) Dionysius or ‘any of the true theologians.’ But he acknowledges that after his voyage to Greece he began to examine these teachers. In DI [De Docta Ignorantia] he several
Dionysius’ text to be revelatory of both the cause and creation of negative affirmation.

Corless quotes from Nicholas’ letter:

Since negative [theology] removes without positing anything, God will not be seen in an unveiled way because of it, for God will not be found to be but rather [will be found] not to be. And if He is sought by way of affirmation, He will be found only through images and in a veiled way … in most places Dionysius taught theology by means of this disjunction: viz. that we approach God either affirmatively or negatively. But in the book where he wants to display mystical and secret theology in a way possible, he leaps beyond this disjunction into a uniting and a coincidence, or a most simple union. This [union] is not a side-by-side conjunction but is vertically beyond all removing and positing—where removing coincides with positing and negation with affirmation.90

Nicholas, through his own conflicting influence by Pseudo-Dionysius and the apophatics, on the one hand, and by Scholasticism, on the other, reveals the possibility of understanding the contradictory expressions as unified. One must think this union as “vertically beyond” negation and affirmation in such a way that negation becomes matched or harmonized with affirmation.91 Pseudo-Dionysius’ method and words recognize and approach this “beyond” as their goal. One uses these inadequate names to raise oneself beyond them to the truth towards which they point:

We call a halt to the activities of our minds … we approach the ray which transcends being. Here, in a manner no words can describe, preexisted all the goals of all knowledge … that neither intelligence nor speech can lay hold of … it surpasses everything and is wholly beyond our capacity to know it” (592D).

---

90 Ibid., 111-2.

91 Ibid., 107.
One must halt reason to access this knowledge. The result of our endeavors is that “we shall be united with him and, our understanding carried away, blessedly happy, we shall be struck by his blazing light” (592C). The stammering of the names of God is the only path by which we can know what we cannot know and express what is inexpressible: “to praise this divinely beneficent Providence you must turn to all of creation” (593D). The Nameless is Every Name: Being, Light, Truth, Cause, Word, Power, and “that he is all, that he is no thing” (596C).

That God is Good is a most fundamental theological claim. It justifies the belief that all things are because of the goodness of God as Creator. Equally fundamental, however, is the acknowledgment that God exceeds what we conceive of as the Good. His goodness is not the goodness of an act of charity, a judgment we cast on a painting, or feeling caused by a smile from a lover. “Given that the Good transcends everything, as indeed it does, its nature, unconfined by form, is the creator of all form. In it is nonbeing really an excess of being. It is not a life, but is, rather, superabundant Life” (607A).

Pseudo-Dionysius argues from this template of affirmation and negation for the names of God as Good, Light, and Beautiful before we are confronted with a provocative name of God that breaks the pattern: Yearning (Eros). Our knowledge, such that it is, is born from our desire to know God and this desire is from God. Since we receive desire from God, Desire becomes a name of God. To call God Love, the Greek agape, is not provocative; it is well-documented throughout the Scriptures as an attribute and name of God. However, Pseudo-Dionysius is not calling God Agape; he has named Him Eros. Further, he does not negate this name; Yearning cures his stutter.92

---

While the flux of affirmation and negation fades, the confidence of his voice falters in a new manner as he rushes to argue that the name is legitimate. He claims the case has already been laid in Scriptures: we faithful always desperately yearn to know God; we desire to be “drawn together toward the divine splendor” (588A). Scripture affirms how sacred minds, contemplating His creations, “with a love matching the illuminations granted them,” are permitted to “… take flight, reverently, wisely, in all holiness” (589A). In love with Him who we can never know well enough, we pluralize every name to try to express the superabundance of all the greatness we nonetheless know our Beloved to be.93 “And so it is that all things must desire, must yearn for, must love, the Beautiful and the Good … each bestirs itself and all are stirred to do and to will … because of the yearning for the Beautiful and the Good” (708A). Simply, we desire God; it is desire in general that motivates all of our naming of the Divine, and thus, we give God the strongest name of Desire.

The case is persuasive, yet Pseudo-Dionysius’ voice falters. He does not negate the name, but he apologizes. Despite claiming a previous treatise to have named him by his symbolic names, from Rock to Dirt to Mixing Bowls, it is for the name Yearning that he proffers the first and only apologetic justification of his treatise:

Let no one imagine that in giving status to the term ‘yearning’ I am running counter to scripture. In my opinion, it would be unreasonable and silly to look at words rather than at the power of the meanings…. Now if in saying this I would appear to be misusing holy scripture, let the critics of the word ‘yearning’ listen to this: ‘Yearn for her and she shall keep you; exalt her and she will extol you; honor her and she will embrace you’ [Prv

---

I take issue with this characterization; while the form is not always perfectly compounded in earlier chapters, these affirmations of names are still co-present with their negations. Where this is most strikingly absent is in the discussion of eros as a name of God.

93 Bernardo Bertolucci’s film “Last Tango in Paris” remarkably illustrates how the intensity of eros is often a reflection of the degree to which lovers remain unknown to one another.
And there are many other scriptural passages in which the yearning of God is praised (708B-C).

A slight bravado in the disclaimer may partially shield his trepidation over his use of Yearning, yet his need to even offer a justification reveals the degree of his awareness of its potential indecency. Further, his bravado pales as the contexts of his cited evidence reveal them to be weak aides for his case. The key support he cites for yearning in the Proverbs identifies the object to be yearned for and exalted is knowledge: “Get wisdom, get understanding …” and “Wisdom is the principle thing.” Wisdom is, indeed, an attribute of God, although the argument that this is an indirection through which we are to yearn for God is difficult to support. Overall, Pseudo-Dionysius’ ample citation of evidence for Scriptural use of the name Eros is weak at best.

McGinn notes the disparity between the Biblical evidence and Pseudo-Dionysius’ testimony throughout The Divine Names and the name Yearning is its best example:

One gets the sense that Dionysius, despite his dependence on a host of biblical passages, represents a tendency to atomize the biblical text in the service of an overriding systematic concern. Although the Areopagite distanced himself from the actual text of scripture in his concern for methodological issues, he would probably have insisted … that his method was revealed in the scriptures themselves as the fundamental hermeneutical principle.

While the argument that Pseudo-Dionysius is revealing the true force of the Scriptural passages is a fascinating one, it is one that demands far greater support than Pseudo-Dionysius offers. The only unquestionable fact we can attest to his citations is that he is fully correct that desire for God is an abundant theme in and beyond the Scriptures as agape. That agape lays a hermeneutical foundation for love to be conceived as eros

94 Proverbs 4:5, 7.
could be argued by turning beyond the Scriptures, but this best evidence comes after
Pseudo-Dionysius and often rests upon the authority the name Dionysius gave him. For
example, the late fourteenth century anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*
writes about the need to labor in the contemplation of God “until you experience the
desire” and that “it is sometimes his will to set on fire the bodily senses of his devout
servants … with marvelous sweetness and consolation.”

Although, even the *Cloud’s* author goes on to repeatedly stress (nervously?) over the course of several further
chapters that this sweetness is not bodily but proceeds from an inner spirit. Bodily desire,
designating *eros*, he argues, is sensation sent by an evil angel and never to be trusted.
Suspicion, he continues, ought to even extend to this divine, inner sweetness granted by
God; accept sweet feelings cautiously and “do not depend too much on them because of
your weakness … it may be that you will be moved to love God simply for their sake.”

Thus, the name of God as Yearning garners no direct and little indirect support
from religious authority and meets no direct negation within *The Divine Names* other
than that suggested through the slight trepidation in Pseudo-Dionysius’ voice. The fact
that his voice belies his confidence in his accord with the Word of God (Scripture) may
be his most honest assent to the name itself. Desire, as conceived by Plato and embraced
up to and through the Neoplatonist Pseudo-Dionysius, is a lack. It is, in itself, no thing.
It is no name. Its name, its existence, is a pointing beyond itself. This will be explored

---

mystics abandoned much of commentary on caution while employing highly erotic language and imagery,
but many of their works met with censure, *cf.* Marguerite D’Oingt’s graphic focus on the body of Christ
(*The Writings of Margaret of Oingt, Medieval Prioress and Mystic*, trans. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski
(Newburyport, MA: Focus Information Group, 1990)), Marguerite Porete’s dialogue *The Mirror of Simple
Souls*’ subsuming God and the trinity under love (*Marguerite Porete: The Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans.
Ellen L. Babinsky (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1993)), and Julian Norwich’s desire to be Christ’s lover,
discussed in the beginning of the section (*A Shewing of God’s Love, Op. Cit.*).

more deeply in chapter four; suffice it to say for now, desire, defined as a lack, permits a hint of the sanctity of desire as a name for God because we can conceive of the end of _eros_ not as consummation, but as an affirmation of the existence of that which we love.
1.6. Concluding Remarks:

“We want to think thoughts that cannot be thought”
—John D. Caputo, The Weakness of God.98

Two chapters in the middle of Lyotard’s The Differend, “Result” and “Obligation,” betray a tonal change, a hint of desperation in his voice, much like that of the trepidation that creeps into Pseudo-Dionysius’ apology for language after proposing the name Eros for God. Both of these authors have written profoundly personal books. Upon the highly logical and abstract theoretical structures each text works, their voices are passionate and echo the sorrows, anxieties, and prayers we can imagine from their respective witnesses. Their respective voices both permit and threaten their projects. Their chosen forms of thought are, equally, expressions of their content.

Lyotard is as honest as he desires the tribunal and witness to be. This honesty challenges our democratic principles and our comprehension that seeks linear arguments that end with conclusive answers. Lyotard engages Faurisson’s repulsive logic and, in some countries, illegal conclusions so as reveal both their legitimacy and absurdity without ever making these direct proclamations. Lyotard moved the same way through Heidegger’s equation of Being and language, neither explicitly adopting nor rejecting it. He, thus, permitted us to see how it could open up the possibility of the silence as a way to reclaim the witness’ ontological validity and how this opening could be as enclosing as the double bind it sought to evade. Lyotard never cites Pseudo-Dionysius in his writings but he does explore alternative methods of expressing the inexpressible that are akin to

the Syrian mystic’s. To each alternative, Lyotard is painfully truthful. Every new method of expression raises hope for defeating the historical revisionists, but he reads carefully and critically, uncovering the inherent problems and possible failures of each one. Lyotard works through and often seems to delight in contradiction like no other thinker. While he never lets a contradiction simply be its rejection, instead, being an opening to look ever more closely, he also never lets us have a clear solution.

This account is precisely the reason why I propose that Pseudo-Dionysius’ radical conjunction of the wholly and essentially contradicting cataphatic and apophatic theologies reveals a most productive possibility for Lyotard’s witness to express the inexpressible. Pseudo-Dionysius’ method will still sound illogical to the court; it, alone, cannot be a solution for Lyotard’s differend. It can be, however, a productive possibility to explore because it can evade the fictionalizing tendencies of linear narrative, to which many of the other explored methods fall prey, and open up two radically non-narrative models of testimony. Pseudo-Dionysius’ method of affirmation and negation lifts his testimony of God’s names beyond reason to silence, to the step beyond the speaking of both sensible and intelligible names, even while it reveals the moment when negation falters, concerning *Eros*. Thus, it is this method and what it profoundly reveals that His speaking the conjunction of contradicting theologies may be the only way to name the unnamable, to give testimony to the empirically impossible; be the only way for a being to endeavor to understand what is beyond being.

Both authors’ passionate voices testify that this venture of pointing to what cannot be pointed to cannot spring from the reason of the court. Their testimony must grow out of the fertile but neglected soil of desire. Out of his desire and by divine command to
faith, Pseudo-Dionysius employed an unique method, justified by the theory of emanation, to provide, defend, and erase the attributes of God so as to come to know Him. These names were born from a traversing of ontological stages within a metaphysical system and consequentially provided him with an epistemology. The epistemological nature of this profound method and record of divine names is most interesting and will prove to be a most productive model for Lyotard. Therefore, it is utterly necessary for this project to take a moment to clarify the contrast between the modes of knowing employed by the historical revisionists and religious skeptics and Pseudo-Dionysius and Lyotard. While the first two and last two are not identical to each other, they share much more in common so as to permit a solid contrast between knowledge that only accepts independently verifiably, logically based, reason versus a knowledge that works up to, through, and beyond reason alone.99

The passions is not a strictly, rigidly defined faculty or group of powers. Modern and contemporary epistemologies, not to mention this project’s revisionist and religious skeptic, have tended towards models that exclude the diversity of human powers from truth determination along battle calls similar to the Cartesian “by the mind alone.” Instead, I intend the passions to designate a knowing that is inclusive of what is typically excluded from intellectual activity, non-exhaustively including: sensory apprehension, whether by exterior or interior senses, drives, will, common sense or sensus communis, imagination or phantasia, memory, intuition or vis aestimativa, and the synthetic powers of mind that blur the distinctions of intelligible activity. I intend to include these modes of knowing under the broad category of the passions to designate what is other than pure

99 Cf. Chapter three, section two e and chapter four, section two, below, for further elaboration of the passions versus reason as an epistemological base.
reason alone and inclusive of all that is invoked by its etymological distinction that the passions are what we suffer. The category will remain broad because it is not the aim of this project to explore any single one power but to pursue how an overly narrow use of reason utterly fails for considering that which eludes its capture. A further reason for the broad category of the passions is because of the question’s long interpretive history that has used common language for designating contrary powers in contrary epistemological models. In essence, the knowledge sought by this project is that prohibited by a narrow conception of reason, yet attainable through the passions; this usage is the simple acknowledgement of the impossibility of dividing a pure mind from body and its embodiment in lived experience. For the Neoplatonism that inspired Pseudo-Dionysius, “in every external object there is an inexpressible element not assimilable in the cognitive process;” it is this element the passions seek. But, first, this passions-based mode of knowing will be elaborated as the most fruitful capture of the inexpressible expression in Jean-François Lyotard’s *The Differend*.

---

100 Quotation from Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, *Op. Cit.*, 276; interpretation, my own.
Chapter Two

Con-Textualizations: Jean-François Lyotard

2.1. Prologue: The Difficulty of Characterization

This chapter and the next mirror one another in their respective endeavors to contextualize Jean-François Lyotard and Pseudo-Dionysius by situating each in his respective intellectual climate. The contextualization of each will be, precisely, textual in two ways. First, it will position their texts, *The Differend* and *The Divine Names*, within the body of literature of each thinker as well as in their respective histories. Second, it will closely read these works to draw out of each the complete portrait offered about the testimony of the witness. The contextualization, understood etymologically as a conjunction of *con-* (“together”) and *texere* (“to weave”), will be a weaving together of the meanings and intentions shared by these two thinkers and demonstrated in their works. The dual situation of authors and texts enacts itself in order to foresee the dialogue of the fourth chapter between the texts of Lyotard and Pseudo-Dionysius on silence and *eros*, two potentially productive responses to the ineffable. This dialogue will speak to the growing, current interest in something other-than-reason that has brought so
many contemporary Continental thinkers back to religious mysticism. Thus, to elaborate the backgrounds of Pseudo-Dionysius and Lyotard is to begin the production of an unprecedented conversation that, nonetheless, is compatible with contemporary concerns. It is a conversation that promises to be productive of further discourse.

The dialogue that Lyotard and Pseudo-Dionysius could initiate between contemporary phenomenological-postmodernism and late antiquity mysticism has been largely ignored in the secondary literature in favor of comparative work limiting itself to postmodern readings of early theology that, typically, either ignore or hastily reject phenomenological insights and methods. Otherwise, the discussions have been from a school of theological phenomenologists, despite the fact that phenomenology falters when it is to describe what it cannot see and these thinkers falter before including the critiques from postmodernism that may further their endeavor. Finally, the immense difficulty of even individually characterizing these two thinkers, let alone drawing parallels between them, may account for the scholarship’s silence. The following two chapters intend to provide some of this research that is currently lacking.

Pseudo-Dionysius, amidst other more subtle difficulties of encapsulating his thought, is, precisely, a pseudonym. Dionysius was the distinguished convert of St. Paul named in Acts 17; Dionysius is not the author of The Divine Names. Just as Lyotard’s

---

101 There could be argued to be two waves of this turn of phenomenologists and post-phenomenologists back to theology. The first wave would include Heidegger, Levinas, Derrida, and Ricoeur while the second wave would include Marion, Nancy, Henri, Chrétien, Caputo, Kearney, some works by Agamben and Bataille, and the vocal criticism of Zizek. The latter wave was celebrated at the Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center 2009 Conference entitled “Phenomenology and the Theoogical Turn,” which featured papers by Marion, Kearney, Wyschogrod, and Lampert. A notable scholarly review of this turn is Dominique Janicaud, “The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology,” trans. Bernard George Prusak, in Phenomenology and the “Theological” Turn: The French Debate (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000). Within postmodernism circles, the most influential article was Jacques Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” in Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).
writing often culls language and theory from law, Pseudo-Dionysius is also often named Dion (the) Areopagite, which identifies him as an Athenian member of the Areopagus, the judicial council.102 Dion, however, is not the author of *The Divine Names*. He who unremittingly invoked the power of names to permit one to know their creator, refuses us his own, truthful name. What we suspect, however, about this pseudonymous author, is that he was a Neoplatonist Christian writing from Syria sometime between 471 or 485 to 518 or 528 C.E. This betrays the further difficulty behind characterizing this thinker. Is he a Neoplatonist or is he a Christian? Is he a philosopher or is he a theologian? Eric D. Perl forcefully addresses this distinction in the very first sentence of his work on Pseudo-Dionysius as he argues Pseudo-Dionysius is to be taken as a philosopher, not as a:

late antique cultural phenomenon; nor as an influential episode in the history of Christian theology; nor as ‘mysticism,’ if that is to be taken to mean something other than philosophy; nor as a series of texts with ascertainable relations of influence and citation …

103

The difficulty in characterizing Pseudo-Dionysius is seen in that he can and has profitably served each of these other roles mentioned. The final, classificatory difficulty is generated by the writings he has left us as evidence of an unknown’s existence. He cites treatises he likely never wrote, quotes teachers who likely never existed, and writes with a style that hovers between poetic prayer and logical treatise.

Jean-François Lyotard, while no pseudonym, has still provoked dispute over what to name him. Is he a phenomenologist, a postmodernist, or even, primarily, a philosopher? Peter Dews names him “something of an anomaly. Lyotard has, in a


number of respects, remained on the margins of an orthodoxy which defined itself
precisely in terms of its focus on, and celebration of, the marginal.” 104 His own
influences are as broad as those fields he has influenced. 105 Robert Harvey and Lawrence
Schehr name him “a polymath of a special sort,” that is:

A philosopher steeped in phenomenology, a militant for pluralist thinking,
an esthetician of the figural, Lyotard staked out territories for innumerable
scholars in literature, the arts, politics, and ethics, as well as in more
recently recognized fields such as gender studies and postcolonialism. 106

His early work was political radicalism followed by work in phenomenology infused with
psychoanalysis and Marxism and directed to studies of the social sciences, literature, and
art. 107 His interests span the canon and the divide between Continental and Analytic
philosophy, and the conception of a “pure” philosophy divorced from the other
humanities, social sciences, and fine arts (one name he held was curator of the Les
Immatériaux, an art exhibit at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris 108).


105 His own influences are documented in Gary Browning’s study Lyotard and the End of Grand Narratives (Cardiff, England: University of Wales Press, 2000), where the final section of the bibliography offers “Studies on Lyotard and/or relating to Themes of his Work” and includes the references for Habermas and Hegel, Marx and Wittgenstein alongside the standard, scholarly secondary works that address Lyotard’s oeuvre. Appreciative of his creativity, I am surprised, however, by Browning’s omission of Kant.


107 He explains his affinity to Freud in his Discours, figure: “Freud’s reflections are, from the beginning to the end of his career … centered on the relation of language and silence, of signification and sense, of articulation and the image, of the commentary which interprets or constructs and the desire which figures” (Lyotard, Discours, figure, 59; quoted in Dews, “Review: The Letter and the Line: Discourse and Its Other in Lyotard,” Op. Cit., 44).

Lyotard’s first book was his rigorous work *Phenomenology* (1954), which employs that method while it reacts against Husserl, working its way through all of the social sciences to end with a critique of Marx. As he ended within the political, there his writing stayed throughout the rest of the 1950s and 1960s. His works from the 1970s still concern politics, yet critique the political foundations his last two decades of work advocated. This prolific decade also witnessed his immense concern with art and psychoanalysis. His most notable work of the decade, however, came in its last year: *La Condition postmoderne* (1979, translated into English as *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* in 1984). This work, his most well known in the United States, explores the impact of the rapid growth and influence of technology on humanity and is centrally concerned with defining the postmodern as that which, in the modern, shows the unpresentable in presentation itself. Gary Browning writes of this work: “In the immediate aftermath of its publication, it served as a cultural signpost pointing towards the postmodern and away from modernity.”

---


110 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), cf. 79-82. For instance: “A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant” (*Ibid.*, 79) and “The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable” (*Ibid.*, 81).

The 1980s were equally prolific years for Lyotard. He wrote several works on art before the 1983 publication of *Le Différend* (translated into English in 1988). This work will be discussed in detail, below. Two other notable works of this decade departed from his usual style of breadth and were almost monographs; the first was *L’Enthousiasme: la critique kantienne de l’histoire* (1986, its English translation is forthcoming in 2009) and the second was *Heidegger et “les juifs”* (1988, translated into English in 1990). A final epic of the 1980s was his all-inclusive *L’Inhumain: causeries sur le temps* (1988, with an English translation in 1992), which is a broad cultural critique of humanism through considerations of time, place, and contemporary art. His first two books of note in the 1990s return to a limited focus on Kant and Heidegger. The first is *Leçons sur l’Analytique du sublime: Kant, Critique de la faculté de juger, #23-29* (1991, with an English translation in 1994), and the second is *Sans Appel. La geste d’Appel en quête d’un commentaire* (1992). From the early nineties up to his death in 1998, his focus was aesthetic and secularly religious on the notion of the unpresentable in the artist Sam Francis, the writer André Malroux, and Saint Augustine.

While Geoffrey Bennington notes that, “at first sight, [Lyotard’s oeuvre is] more remarkable for its shifts and breaks than for any continuity,” it is also not entirely

---


discontinuous. In memorial, Michael Naas points out that “in every subject he took on, in all these heterogeneous projects, Lyotard was interested in what resists within them and in the dangers of resisting and thus concealing this heterogeneity and this resistance.” All of his works seem to be after a consideration of what is not considered.

For example, The Postmodern Condition names the postmodern as:

that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable.

In a letter written in the early 1980s, Lyotard describes the postmodern’s presentation of the unpresentable as one “which refuses the consolation of correct forms… and inquires into new presentations—not to take pleasure in them but to better produce the feeling that there is something unpresentable.”

Yet, Lyotard’s singular focus on the inexpressible and his broadly pluralist intellectual agility in its pursuit has not provoked parallels in the secondary research to these themes of utmost importance to the early mystics, most notably, his rich parallels with Pseudo-Dionysius.

This same interest that renders Lyotard’s writings so akin to the mystics of late antiquity and the middle ages may be that which rendered the scholarship rather mute about his philosophical relationships to his contemporaries, despite their incessant references to “postmodernism,” “differends,” and “narratives.” This possibility is suggested in Gary Browning’s remark, “Lyotard is a demanding thinker, complex and a

---

strain to live with. He takes paths that are the other side of where most of us are going.”¹¹₈ On the one hand, all of contemporary thought that names itself postmodernism is in the wake of Jean-François Lyotard. On the other hand, so little of what calls itself postmodernism respects the warnings and reminders of his work. Thus, it may be more accurate to say that all of the major currents of contemporary philosophy are in his wake as being those guilty of that which he diagnoses.

Jacques Derrida, in his memorial essay “Lyotard and Us,” writes, “For I know that the debt that binds me to Jean-François Lyotard is in some sense incalculable; I am conscious of this and want it thus.”¹¹⁹ This may be the most honest expression of Lyotard’s influence. The influence is there, throughout contemporary philosophy and its scholarship, as it is throughout Derrida’s large body of work, but it is nearly incalculable. The influence, for the most part, appears to be conscious of its debt to some degree, to be thought in conversation with Lyotard’s or employing his notions and language. But consciousness is not calculability; to what degree contemporary thought is Lyotard’s thought is left unthought. For Derrida:

I will thus not even begin to give an account of this debt, to give an accounting of it, whether with respect to friendship or to philosophy, or to that which, linking friendship to philosophy, will have kept us [gardés] together, Jean-François and me… in so many places and so many times that I cannot even begin to circumscribe them.¹²⁰

And why would thinking want it this way? One reason the incalculability may be desired is because of the rampant misuse of what Lyotard bequeathed contemporary discussions.

¹¹₈ Gary Browning, Lyotard and the End of Grand Narratives, Op. Cit., vii. Lyotard, I hazard, would have been pleased with this observation.
¹²₀ Ibid.
His vocabulary has everywhere been co-opted in a thoughtless manner because of its radical edge, its desirable image. Lyotard crafted arguments and employed words and ideas to unhinge thought that then became the very currency of the consumptive culture they sought to evade.

Further, contemporary thinkers may not account for Lyotard’s influence because it may be unconscious. To claim their heritage in his insights is risky because what, exactly, is his position on anything at all? Just as it is dangerous to exclaim with our history of skeptics “I affirm the truth that there is no truth,” it is unfaithful to Lyotard’s thought to try to pin it to one clear stance on any one issue. A final point of incalculability of Lyotard’s influence may be, as Derrida admitted, that influence from Lyotard often yielded work without “even a common accord [ensemble]” to its origin.121

In addition to Derrida, Lyotard was friends with Gilles Deleuze, and he was geographically, temporally, and philosophically close to Michel Foucault. The nearly simultaneous early works of Lyotard and Derrida were concerned explicitly with Husserl’s phenomenology.122 Within about a four-year spread, all four thinkers were producing works critical of phenomenological and structuralist positions simultaneously as the influence of Freud and Marx can be felt in them in varying degrees.123 A sharp departure from Freud and Marx can be read barely a year apart in both Lyotard and

121 Ibid.


Deleuze.\textsuperscript{124} This shared vocabulary of concerns and influences does not guarantee accord between these thinkers, but the dialogue is as rich as it is nuanced in agreements and disagreements.

Even as Lyotard diverged further away as the others tended to greater agreement amongst themselves, by all accounts that have surfaced, not one holds a negative image of Lyotard as a person and philosopher. Even his most biting critics often only admit to not understanding him. No one dismisses his rigor, passion, or genuineness. But, most of contemporary philosophy is guilty before Lyotard’s thinking; most contemporary thought can be taken to task by his careful readings. Occasionally, those in his wake recognize this and recognize that his work has succeeded, as in Gary Browning’s reflection that, “his work… is important, and offers flashes of inspiration as well as sustained hard thinking that challenge much in what we are and how we operate.”\textsuperscript{125}

Beyond his progeny of postmodernity itself, Lyotard has lit contemporary thought through with further, notable “flashes of inspiration.” The first, not new, but newly infused with relevancy, is fragmentation. Lyotard, being a careful reader of Hegel and Husserl, embraced the opposite impulse from the construction of a system or a \textit{Wissenschaft}. His thinking more closely resembles an abstract mosaic mural: each piece a sparkling artifact of rethinking thoughts and each can be seen to link almost endlessly with so many other captivating tiles around it. And, stepping back, one can see a fantastic large mural—but it is abstract: it does not represent any one thing and every re-seeing reveals the lines tending in a new direction to new shapes wherein new color combinations catch the eye. His legacy is further like the image he was partial to: clouds


in the sky, forever drifting, forming shapes here and there that one may see and another may see differently, perennially blurring together and separating. Hand in hand with his thought embodying fragmentation, it embraces pluralism. To see something in the mural or in the sky, one cannot expect only what one wants. One must entertain open desire for the multiplicity of possible views, methodologically (phenomenology, structuralism to post-structuralism, Freudian to Lacanian psychoanalysis, analytic philosophy) and materially (history, science, art, politics).

Most important, and why Lyotard has uniquely brought something to these not new requirements of fragmentary and pluralistic thinking, is that the way that the fragments link together and the plural methods and contents come to inform thinking must neither be purely random nor strictly rule-based. Here is the dangerous edge that Lyotard’s thinking walks. Linkages are endless and phrasing is endless, yet there is silence. The linkages must come together in a legitimate manner, harmonize and open the silent space of accord, even while we ceaselessly seek a new kind of illegitimacy that will permit the meaningful rupturing of silence. Phenomenology’s seeing is fruitful, but cannot be the method alone. Structuralism’s consequences from seeing the world as a text is fruitful, but cannot be the method alone. Seeing and reading contradict one another as approaches to the world, but uncovering this conflict cannot dismiss its own productivity. Philosophy cannot operate in ignorance of history, but history cannot presume to be a science of actual events. Philosophy cannot operate in ignorance of politics, but politics cannot claim to be the accurate representation of reality. History and

---


127 Lyotard’s engagement with phenomenology and post-structuralism is explored in greater detail in this chapter’s following section.
politics presume that singular events can be represented and narratives be fixed and truthful; philosophy must reveal the impossibility of capturing the singular event and the illusions that proceed from grand narratives without ignoring our strong drive to these impossibilities and the positive contribution they can issue.

This acceptance and denial required of every position, each itself required, makes reading Lyotard taxing and leaves his synopsis as a legacy of seemingly logical paradoxes. Carefully reading him frustrates the desires of the reader (yet, that frustration being that which intensifies the desire to understand him). If I read *Libidinal Economy*, Marxist and Freudian through and through, I can only be left with an argument for the impossibility of Marxism coexisting with Freudian thought, and the impossibility of their being understood in isolation from one another. If I read *The Differend* seeking an argument against hateful historical revisionists and a solution permitting the witness to testify I will only find my own silence before the former and the continued impossibility of the latter. An analytic reading could show (almost any) one text in opposition to another, his early work too Marxist or phenomenological, his later work too aesthetic or mystical, various turnings in his career to be inconsistent “flip-flopping” between positions. These readings would be productive insofar as one ought to focus one’s eyes on how his ideas link to other ideas, and it would be misled insofar as it would be likely offered as evidence of non-rigorous thinking and an explanation for dismissing him. Ironically, every critic who withholds this final judgment is, actually, in the wake of Lyotard’s influence.

The remainder of this chapter will seek to be an honest analysis of a consistently pervasive theme through Lyotard’s works: the ineffable. This task is to draw out from his
works a portrait of the witness who is forbidden testimony and what options she may or may not have to uncover a new idiom by which to speak. It will be accomplished by briefly working through what Lyotard means by the “postmodern” before focusing upon a close textual reading of the inexpressible in his *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*. Silence, as an option for the witness, has been addressed in chapter one. Therefore, this textual reading will be particularly concerned with exploring other options of phrase registers that disrupt the bind of logic and may prove promising to yield a new idiom for the bearing witness to the ineffable. The first option explored will be the style of a stream of conscious and use of “and” in the writings of Gertrude Stein. Next, will be an exploration into language games and their therapeutic nature in Ludwig Wittgenstein. Third, will be a variation of the stream of consciousness style as conducted by the parataxtical construction of Theodor Adorno’s texts. The final consideration will be the unique traditional narrative style of the South American Cashinahua Indians. Lyotard takes up these considerations in varying contexts throughout his work and to disparate depth and length, yet they have been selected for examination in this chapter for as the most illuminative examples of styles and methods that subvert standard logic and grammar and thereby offer the most promise for being a model from which to craft the witness an unprecedented idiom for linking impossibly disparate phrase regimes.
2.2. What is Postmodernism?

“…is postmodernity the pastime of an old man who scrounges in the garbage-heap of finality looking for leftovers, who brandishes unconsciousnesses, lapses, limits, confines, goulags, parataxes, non-senses, or paradoxes, and who turns this into the glory of his novelty, into his promise of change?”
—Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend.*

“Postmodernism” is as allergic to characterization as Pseudo-Dionysius and Lyotard. It has been used as a name for a school of thought for a highly heterogeneous cast, a temporal designation of contemporary philosophy and literature, and as a commercial adjective. Most definitions of it Lyotard, its widely accepted “father,” would reject. According to Geoffrey Bennington, “To the extent that Lyotard’s ‘postmodern’ is important, it means almost exactly what he means by ‘philosophy’…” Postmodernism is not a formal school of thought as there is no clear manifesto that sets an organizing principle to thinkers labeled as postmodern. Yet, the postmodern does signify something different than the post-modern, the diachronical next step past the modern. Lyotard writes, “…postmodernism is not modernism at its end, but in a nascent state, and this state is recurrent.” And, as a mode of thinking, postmodernism is not a thoughtless borrowing of cultural and epoch-crossing references in everything from contemporary fiction to architecture to fashion. While postmodernism is a study in love with contradictions, this love is not haphazard: “Eclecticism is the degree zero of


contemporary general culture: you listen to reggae, you watch a western, you eat McDonald’s at midday and local cuisine at night, you wear Paris perfume in Tokyo and dress retro in Hong Kong, knowledge is the stuff of TV game shows.”131 Thus, a better conception of postmodernism is a method of thinking that puts into question the story of the modern while it simultaneously proffers and challenges the possibility of the story being otherwise.

Lyotard protests that “postmodern,” “…is probably a very bad term, because it conveys the idea of a historical ‘periodization,’” as if one could sketch out a line and say: This is Enlightenment thinking, which gives way to modern philosophy, which gives way to postmodern philosophy.132 His critique, which adopts a tone akin to Husserl’s critique of historicism in his “Philosophy as a Rigorous Science,” argues that this periodization biases us to think we are always progressing and, occasionally, to support arguments of our persistent decline from the golden ideal. Ironically, he argues that this bias would not even qualify as ‘post’ modern because “…the diachronical periodization of history is typically a modern obsession…” Lyotard writes, “To the same extent that modernity contains the promise of its overcoming, it is urged to mark, occasionally to date, the end

---

131 *Ibid.*, 17. Further, “The re-writing meant here [postmodernism] has obviously nothing to do with what is called postmodernity or post-modernism on the market places of today’s ideologies. It has nothing to do with the use of parodies and quotations of modernity or modernism in either architectural, theatrical, or pictorial pieces, and even less with that movement resorting to the traditional forms of narrative as they have been displayed in novels or short stories” (Jean-François Lyotard, “Re-Writing Modernity,” *SubStance* 16, 3, 54 (1987): 3-9, 8).

of an age and the beginning of another.”133 This bias leads us to form “grand narratives,”
stories that, in essence, place blinders upon a thinker and hamper genuine reflection.

Grand narratives are the powerful stories we call upon to create and structure
meaning, and often, also, to rally people. These stories may conjure national identity or
portray capitalist political economy or invoke proletariat struggle or emancipation from
marginalization. They are highly effective in coalescing distracted masses to effect social
change and revolution, but, ultimately, can become a totalitarian imposition of a rigid
identity and closed intellectual perspective. Postmodernism is a method that attempts to
uncover these narratives that hamper our thought. But, it is precisely the diagnosis of the
grand narratives we construct that is partially responsible for a “pop-postmodernism.” To
diagnose grand narratives suggests that one can break their bind through a playful
interruption of their linearity, disruption of their symbols, and “solve” all problems; the
unfortunate consequence being a proliferation of texts with oddly spelled words,
excessively used hyphens, and the invocation of new narratives in the combat of old ones.

When we think, as we “rational animals” are occasionally inclined to do (which is
a grand narrative in itself), and discover one of these epic accounts, we are disposed to
act passionately. We counter nationalism with an argument for humanism, only post-
facto in recollection acknowledging the binds of a humanist narrative. We encourage an
open embrace of tolerance for different perspectives and political paradigms to counter
the failings of capitalism, but then come to see the threat of globalization as we forcefully
embrace, modify, and take over other systems. We take up the cause of radical equality
and brotherhood in the face of marginalization. Then, as we see that we have eliminated
individual freedom, we rush to embrace the differentiated subject. In our passionate and

well-read responses to these binds, we invoke new grand narratives to counter grand narratives. To step outside of action and diagnose this tendency as Hegelian dialectics or as the psychological habit of closure is also to invoke narratives. Thus, the act of uncovering narratives and becoming aware of the tendency to create new ones is to become aware of how we think and how thinking (and the unthought) guides our being in the world. This is postmodernism.

And, yet, this is why Lyotard adopts the term “re-writing modernity” instead of postmodernism, because:

…modernity presupposed a compulsion to get out of itself and to resolve itself, therefore, into something else, into a final equilibrium, be it a utopian order or the political purpose involved in the Canonical Narratives—so that in this sense postmodernity is a promise with which modernity is pregnant definitely and endlessly.134

Modernity desired its end through a rebirth into an epic resolution and postmodernism strives to be its perennial editor. Husserl’s critiques of historicism and psychologism revealed very similar traps of thought and his phenomenological method permitted a way to set out of consideration these biasing narratives. Lyotard was a careful reader of Husserl and phenomenology and is much more like a phenomenologist than a variant of structuralism, like most of his contemporaries. For example, Lyotard preserves phenomenology’s preference of seeing the world over the post-structuralist tendency to view the world as a text we read, which is explicit in Derrida.135 Why, then, if he grants credence to phenomenology, does Lyotard need to distinguish a way of

134 Ibid., 3-4.

thinking like re-writing modernity? In his early book on phenomenology, Lyotard praised Husserl’s philosophy for its ability to best discern the proper object for study, especially within the social sciences, and the best method of directing one’s attention to this object in its essence, first, then its application beyond itself to other studies.\textsuperscript{136} He also praised phenomenology as a preeminent method of validation of the philosophical success of each study. His dominant critique of phenomenology, in that early work, focused upon its inability to address history critically, that is, politically and therefore being unable to help supplement Marxism. Obviously, Lyotard would drift away from this early critique of phenomenology as he distanced himself from Marxism and militant political action. There must be, then, another trace of critique that leads Lyotard to re-writing over phenomenology.

Lyotard, I believe, founds re-writing as a synthesis of the positive traits and eschewal of the negative that he found in the conflicting veins of phenomenology and structuralism. Like phenomenology first did and post-structuralism followed, Lyotard shuns historicism and psychologism, as can be seen in his critique of grand narratives. His means of shunning these biases begins much like the phenomenological method of the epoché and proceeds much like both phenomenology’s careful return to originary essences and post-structuralism’s re-reading histories of ideas to uncover and avoid biases. As a middle ground between these two variations of the suspension and revisititation of ideas, Lyotard’s search for idiom by which the witness could speak is enacted much like Husserl’s eidetic reduction, that reduction which he first invoked as a preparation or an exercise before enacting the full, phenomenological reduction. This method permitted its own repetition and allowed for failure; it did not seek originary

essences, but practiced the suspension of biases and invoked the proper mindset for the philosophy to continue. It avoids the presumption of essences, critiqued by post-structuralism, while successfully avoiding biases and invoking the repetition utilized by Pseudo-Dionysius and demonstrated throughout *The Differend*.

The embrace of a phenomenological exercise, rather than the full routine, permits Lyotard’s method to be an interruption and unceasing perpetuation of the phenomenologist’s next step of describing the presentations she has seen. This interruption, differing from phenomenology, melds with the structuralists’ rejection of originary essences, and permits Lyotard to demonstrate what is best captured by a premise underlying the Neoplatonist theory of emanation: any event overflows its possible encapsulation. Or, as one eloquent reviewer phrases it, Lyotard is revealing that “the effort of language to capture a prelinguistic word is foredoomed,” even while he keeps trying.137 While this preference for an incessant and diverse rendition may open an interesting study into Lyotard’s embrace of the phenomenological account of time, supplemented by his thoughtful consideration of Augustine’s account of time and memory in the *Confessions*, it also more profoundly reveals the remarkable position he holds on the question of presence.

While it is clear that Lyotard preserves phenomenology’s emphasis of presentations as an inclination to seeing the world rather than considering it, like the post-structuralists, to be like a text that can be read, Lyotard is obviously concerned with the ineffable, with that which *does not* appear to us. Therefore, if phenomenology describes the laid-bare appearance, how can it be used to describe that which does not appear or

express that which appears but confounds our capacity to re-present it to ourselves or others? He does not, then, embrace the post-structuralists as the opposite theoretical stance because they, too, have difficulty permitting pure spontaneity, immediacy, or the un-structured, the un-linked within their system. Therefore, while Lyotard does not want to affirm origins to the disregard of our historical, existential, and linguistic formation but he does admit that there is more than what can be seen or logically deduced and seeks to uncover what otherwise remains un-presented. Presence, permitted by phenomenology and critiqued by structuralism, can capture immediacy and evade processing perception into an objectivity. But, for Lyotard, this presence, to reveal the unpresented, which “invokes the un-presentable in presentation itself,” must permit a mode of awareness that is like a seeing and painting of the world in its activity, that is, as if engaged in the very act of creation on an unending canvas.\(^\text{138}\)

The use of language including seeing, painting, and creating is apt as much of Lyotard’s writing was art criticism and aesthetic theory. All of his philosophy, notably his frequent recourse to an interpretation of the sublime, could be argued to be aesthetics. “Aesthetics,” from aisthesthai, the Greek verb “to perceive,” is a study, for Lyotard, that precisely concerns perception and not, therefore, one concerned solely with matters of taste or whence to divide the sublime from the beautiful. It is not a study undertaken from a perspective of the disinterested perception of form, but a philosophy that is sensuously aware, that makes the thinker feel “…the anguish of being full of holes.”\(^\text{139}\) Philosophy is more than description of the phenomenological lived experience, it is a

---


thinking in and from an intense embodiment wherein one is yanked from anesthesia of objectivity and one desperately tries, and fails, and tries again to capture and express this experience. Philosophical activity comes upon us suddenly and catches us unaware like the moment one finds oneself confronted with an abyss, a plunging canyon, a violent storm, a raging war, an infinitely tall mountain. Throughout his oeuvre, Lyotard is concerned with the perception of the sublime and how to express the inexpressible, which is asking, also, the phenomenological and aesthetic question of how to keep a memory alive if remembering lacks a fixed narrative and is always reconstituted. It is in Lyotard’s oddly phenomenological-pos-structuralist-postmodern aesthetics that one may uncover the possibility of representing what we have forgotten or been unable to express.

This consistent task of his also best captures his critique of phenomenology and why he needed to found postmodernism as a re-writing: this endeavor is not strictly epistemological. Lyotard’s critique is not the destruction of phenomenology; it could be argued to even be consistent with it. Instead, Lyotard’s critique brings a great benefit to phenomenology by proffering it a path beyond itself: beyond epistemology alone, avoiding critiques of origins, religiously biased and subject-presumptive preferences for monologue, and an over-emphasis on reason. This is invaluable to its usage in the social science and to phenomenology’s theological turn.

140 This, again, hearkens the question of Lyotard’s engagement of phenomenology’s conception of time and that in Augustine’s Confessions when he asks, how can I love you, God, if I cannot remember you?: “Past, present, future—as many modes of presence in which the lack of presence is projected” (Jean-François Lyotard, The Confession of Augustine, trans. Richard Beardsworth (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 17). Lyotard also seems to employ a conception of the “now” as conceivable through aesthetics. In permitting aesthetics to best express the idea of memorial, Lyotard’s aesthetics could be capable of founding a political program (although, later, he dismisses vehemently the viability of programs) perhaps akin to Jacques Rancière’s, wherein politics fights for the image of society and aesthetics is a singularity that cannot be isolated, yet can be a model for society (cf., Jacques Rancière, The Politics of Aesthetics, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2006)).
Since the critique is not devastating, it is proper to ask more precisely that, if we have carefully re-read phenomenology and have come to recognize these binds, acknowledge their danger, and seek to avoid reinscribing them, do we still need Lyotard’s re-writing? If we heed his lessons, can the persistent exercise end? Lyotard accedes that we have become wise to or fearful of some rallying cries, apathetic to others, and suspicious of most of them. Given this, it is far more difficult to galvanize unity and movement by inventing and appealing to a meaning conjured in a story of these symbols.\textsuperscript{141} However, this is, for Lyotard, precisely another explanation for why we need postmodernism. We once more feel the penetrating vacancy of meaning that spurred the moderns (and could all peoples in all times) to create these stories as a curative or salve to meaninglessness. As Nietzsche reminds us in the \textit{Genealogy}, “man would sooner have the void for his purpose than be void of purpose.”\textsuperscript{142} We may acknowledge that these stories, these “grand narratives,” can no longer salvage our thought, but, still, we desire salvation.

This is why Lyotard argues that the “re-” of the “re-writing” recalls redemption or revelation, the renaissance or revival, and the revolution. He elaborates these

\textsuperscript{141} “These narratives have lost their credibility for the bulk of contemporary societies, and are no longer sufficient to ensure a political, social, and cultural bond, as they had once claimed to do. Our situation is that we have little confidence in them anymore” (Lyotard, “Rules and Paradoxes and Svelte Appendix,” \textit{Op. Cit.}, 210).

\textsuperscript{142} Friedrich Nietzsche, \textit{Genealogy of Morals}, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Anchor Books, 1956), Essay III, §XXVIII, 299, which is the last line of the work and reformulates its first appearance in §1 of Essay III, 231. For Lyotard, without narratives, one has a social and intellectual climate where “We must confront the problem of meaning without any possibility of responding with hopes for the emancipation of humanity … or for that of the Spirit … or with the practice of the Proletariat to achieve the constitution of a transparent society. Even capitalism, the liberal or neo-liberal discourse, seems to have little credibility in the contemporary situation: that does not mean that capitalism is finished, quite the contrary. But it does mean that it no longer knows how to legitimate itself. The old legitimation, ‘everyone will prosper,’ has lost its credibility” (Lyotard, “Rules and Paradoxes and Svelte Appendix,” \textit{Op. Cit.}, 210).
instantiations of the “re-” through reference to therapy.\textsuperscript{143} Re-writing is an activity. Postmodernity will never solve the tale of modernity because it does not have an answer (an essence or origin) that one could genealogically discern. But, to lack an answer is not to lack meaning; postmodernism takes the tale of modernity and just keeps reworking it. This constant endeavor shows itself as meaningful even in its absence of concluding truths, which would only be further reinscription of grand narratives. Thus, the “re-” of re-writing modernity is not a return to an origin but is better compared to the Freudian *Durcharbeitung*, a “working through” that Lyotard describes as “a work of thinking the meanings or events that are hidden not only in *pre*-judices but also in *pro*-jects, *pro*-grams, *pro*-spects and the like, that are concealed even in the propositions or purposes of a *psychoanalysis*.”\textsuperscript{144}

Lyotard profitably uses Freud and Sophocles to point to the comparisons between our desire for grand narratives and the psychoanalytic desire to let the patient find her ills and their cures in constructing her narrative. The analyst deciphers this narrative to reveal the diseases she suffers and encourage her new, healthier narratives. Narratives have opening and closing rhymes (either literally, as in Greek tragedy, or through the harmonization of meaning, as in psychoanalysis) and grant meaning through offering causes for events. Narratives, like those of OEdipus, the patient, and all modernity, for

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{143} Alongside being a reference to his engagement with Freudian psychoanalysis, this may point to Wittgenstein’s view of therapy (who was cited as the work’s “pretext” (xiii)): “The philosopher’s treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness” (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), §255).
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\end{flushleft}
Sophocles and Freud, “seek access to consciousness of the reason, the cause for the ills they are suffering and have suffered during their lives—they seek rememoration, the remembering of a dismantled time…” L. Lyotard notes that this recollection “resembles a detective novel.” A. Antiquity’s tragedies, modernity, and Freudian patient demonstrate the firm embrace of the belief that fate can foretell one’s future and its cure can be sought by tracing its past. Postmodernism, however, is the therapy that never ends, that never cures the patient by locating the wrong, but reveals the productivity of aporia.

To stress the never-ending nature of postmodernism’s re-writing is to toy with the suggestion of the theory’s futility. If we heed the warning to not fall prey to grand narratives, to not reinscribe that which we discern as a bind and desire to overcome, what may we do? Standing mute before the vision of the insurmountable impasse was rejected in chapter one. Do we, then, endlessly babble incoherencies that gain nothing, change nothing? Postmodernism re-writes modernity to work through it; thus, it must be productive. Lyotard describes it as a “work without purpose and, therefore, without will…” Thus, to re-write is oddly reminiscent of a Kantian freies Spiel, a free play. Lyotard continues, “without purpose in the sense that it works without being guided by


146 Ibid.

147 Postmodernism as a detective story would be in that “Choose your Own Adventure” series of children’s books, which requires one to read them over and again, from the start and through each new ending.

148 The translators of Lyotard’s collected correspondences ask: “If it is no longer possible, or credible, to assume the authority to speak for the future, what escape is there from an endless repetition of the already-said?” They answer in his spirit, “But thought has to proceed. Lyotard argues that it must do so by casting itself adrift …” (Lyotard, The Postmodern Explained, Op. Cit., foreword).

the concept of its aim, but not without purposiveness.\textsuperscript{150} For Lyotard, this may be conceived of as a free play of narration whose aim is not to diagnose disease and engage treatment but to be the activity of philosophy that hopefully uncovers those stories that cannot be told and points to the possibility of their linkage into intelligibility.

Lyotard’s \textit{The Differend} carefully examines precisely this: the logical and necessary linkages that phrases enact to form narration and communication, and when these linkages fail. When these associations logically cannot happen we have differends, those impasses that cause the silencing of parties. Thus, re-writing may be revelatory of a way to speak productively when a victim cannot give testimony to the crime committed against her because of an insurmountable, un-linkable abyss between the phrase universes of the prosecution and defense. Lyotard’s postmodernist rendering of Freudian free association results in a philosophical method:

A fragment of a sentence, a bit, one word, is coming up. You link it on the spot with another bit… In doing so, you are gradually getting close to a scene…You sketch it out… it refers to the past… Lost time is not re-presented as on a tableau or even presented at all. Lost time is presenting the elements of the tableau and re-writing is primarily the recording of them…. this re-writing gives us no knowledge of the past… it is a matter of technique, of art rather than science. Re-writing doesn’t result in a definition of the past. On the contrary, it presupposes that the past is acting by giving the mind the elements with which the scene will be built.\textsuperscript{151}

Lyotard’s conception of free association renders it a phenomenological method that can uncover structural paradoxes and freely speak to them in such a way that upsets the logic that maintains them as paradoxes. His conception of free association as re-writing modernity is less Freudian than it is akin to the Kantian work of imagination on the sense of the beautiful. This method and Kant’s:

\textsuperscript{150} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{151} \textit{Ibid.}
…have in common the importance given to the free acceptance of the bits released by sensitivity; and second, the emphasis put on the release of forms in aesthetic pure pleasure, making them as free from empirical or cognitive interest as possible such that the more fluid, shifting, and evading the phenomena, the more beautiful.\(^{152}\)

The more beautiful, according to Kant, are like the flames blazing and shifting in a fireplace and the play of figures fleeting, formed by quickly flowing waters. With these images as illustrative, “Kant comes finally to the principles according to which imagination gives the mind ‘much to think,’ more to think than the understanding, working with concepts, can give it.”\(^{153}\) This is what Lyotard wishes to proffer the logically-bound witness; not a new narrative to reinscribe the possibility for new charges from the revisionists but a source of speaking that floods the abyss between logical genres. Like Kant’s, Lyotard’s project is a critical one and ends in aesthetics. Like an abstract artist, Lyotard writes “…it is not up to us to provide reality but to invent allusions to what is conceivable but not presentable.”\(^{154}\) The productivity of postmodernism is like that of art; its productivity is invocation. This production will now be demonstrated through the consideration of Lyotard’s *The Differend.*

\(^{152}\) Ibid.

\(^{153}\) Ibid.

2.3. Lyotard’s *The Differend*

“The time has come to philosophize”
—Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend.*

In an interview with Bernard Blistène, Lyotard described the goal of both reflective artists and aesthetic thinkers as being “…not up to us to provide reality but to invent allusions to what is conceivable but not presentable.” This is a productive instruction for how to read Lyotard’s method in, and the overall structure of, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*. Allusion is persistently at work therein as a means of indirection, pointing the reader through highly conceptual turns of its logic to connections between heterogeneous topics. A compelling allusion immediately apparent is to Wittgenstein’s *Zettel*, which translates from the German to “slips of paper,” and was precisely the collected volume of the many slips of paper that Wittgenstein cut from various typeset pages from his earlier works. Like Wittgenstein’s work, *The Differend* treats diverse topics in a coherent and systematic, yet nonlinear, manner. There is neither dictated premise nor conclusion yet there are abiding themes that reveal the activity of productive philosophy. A sympathetic reader may compare the prose and structure to the pedagogy at work in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, “The real issue is not exhausted by stating...

---

155 Lyotard, *The Differend, Op. Cit.*, Preface’s “Context,” xiii; “L’heure de philosopher” (Lyotard, *Le Differend* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1983), “Conte,” 11). The following textual analysis will use parenthetical citations to the English page number, for the preface and notices, and section number for the main text. All other works will be footnoted. The French, when particularly important, will either be inserted in the text in brackets, if a matter of words, or footnoted, for longer passages. All French quotations will come from the *Ibid.*, and simply noted in the French pagination for the preface and notices, and by section for the main text. When my translations differ from the English edition, it will be noted.

it as an aim, but by carrying it out, nor is the result the actual whole, but rather the result together with the process through which it came about.”¹⁵⁷ Another fruitful comparison may be to Plato’s dialogues, as Lyotard’s reader slips into a role much like that of Socrates’ interlocutor: trying out various hypotheses, discovering the failure of each, and never receiving an answer.¹⁵⁸ The answer, for Lyotard, is impossible; yet, seeking it, nonetheless, is absolutely necessary. The witness must be able to testify against the historical revisionists, but, within their binding logic, the differend is impassable. We can conceive an answer, but we do not know how to formulate this idiom. In other words, The Differend’s form is as important as its content; the form is a demonstration of the content, and both evade the linear in order to demonstrate the failings of such direct logic.

The remainder of this chapter will step inside of Lyotard’s text and attempt to follow its indirection with an eye to the options and failures of different narratives. I will begin with a more elaborate demonstration of his style as an encapsulation of his book and then explore various models of his as forms of alternative testimony for the witness. These possibilities include examinations of the avant-garde author Gertrude Stein’s methodology, Ludwig Wittgenstein’s language games, Theodor Adorno’s parataxtical writing, and the storytelling style of the South American Cashinahua Indians.

The Differend begins with a preface in the form of a “reading dossier” [Fiche de lecture]. The main text follows in a non-linear narrative divided into brief numbered


sections interspersed with analytic excurses of disparate texts. The reading dossier begins with a definition of the work’s title, “differend.” The definition starts concisely only to unravel and undermine its intention to be a definition by the interspersion of six disjointed parenthetical comments. The first two parentheticals “(at least)” broaden his claims, while the other four seem to clarify his points. The clarification, however, actually only succeeds in further multiplication of their meanings through specific cases (xi). It is unclear if these additions are to offer value judgments or preferences on the part of the author, to clarify his meaning or purposely to obscure it. His sardonic wit, throughout, further makes us question how we are to interpret his “definitions.”

Lyotard, as a careful reader of Augustine’s *tolle lege*, gives us incessant allusion and an invitation to hermeneutical engagement within this dossier. Hermeneutics, whether concerned with the Talmud, the Bible, Plato, or the human person as text, teaches methods of discernment of (often esoteric) messages through the careful consideration of etymology, tone, use of symbol, and consideration of form. Within Lyotard, rhetorical questions become indirect commands to read through, in, around, and behind his words because it is this very activity that will be the object of investigation. The indirection is accentuated by a disdainful tease that the reading dossier “will allow the reader, if the fancy grabs him or her, to ‘talk about the book’ without having read it” (xiv). His jest succeeds if it makes us aware that there is something in us that desires to be able to “talk about” things without the labor of “working through” them.

The reading dossier’s further address of the object, thesis, problem, stakes, context, and more of the work to come, defies being a typical preface that gives one concise definitions and clear summations. In Lyotard’s hands, it tells us nothing
straightforwardly, nonetheless telling us much about his endeavor. It tells us (without saying a word) to look at the words, ideas, my slant and your prejudices. In the dossier section entitled “Style,” Lyotard (as “A,” the Author) writes that his “ideal is to attain a zero degree style [le degré zéro du style] and for the reader to have the thought in hand, as it were” (xiv).\(^{159}\) What is a “zero degree” style is vague, although most of its definitions would suggest that Lyotard struggles to or outright fails in attaining his ideal. If “zero degree” means the equally obtuse “deconstructed” style, one may say it is one represented by the careful textual analysis or hermeneutics demonstrated in the argumentative style of Plato’s dialogues, defined in Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione* and elaborated in his *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, and codified into theory through medieval Biblical analysis. If this is Lyotard’s goal, he achieves it. His critical reading of texts is superior. However, “deconstructed” can also designate the Heideggerian “destroyed” text, wherein he tries to erase the signification of words by printing “Being” or replacing it with only an ellipsis. This model is only accurate for Lyotard if the destroyed is not the signification of words but their grammar’s inherent tendency to fictionalize through linear narrative.

The designation of a “zero degree” style may also suggest that he intends to stylistically render a minimalist work. If so, his profound clutter of allusions and references undermines his intention. The density of his excurses appears to be the opposite of the minimalist style, say, of Beckett. Only a highly sympathetic reading of minimalism, one that understands sparse prose or visual emptiness as a grasp of an excess of meaningful density, would permit this designation for Lyotard’s work. What is

\(^{159}\) Note the striking similarity to Kierkegaard’s pedagogic use of “A” as “Author” in *Either/Or*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).
minimal in his book is connection; in content, this lack is between topics, in form, it is between sections and excurses. Neither a tone of authorial opinion nor form of logical argument guides the interconnection between his many topics. As is the case of a minimalist book or painting, this absence can be conceived as pregnant: simultaneous with a discernment of its barrenness is the appearance of one’s own prejudices and interpretations pasted onto his richly blank text.

Within the body of his text are seven chapters, further divided into numbered paragraphs. Each flows with conceptual clarity while, simultaneously, they stand discontinuous from one another. Interspersed unevenly between these numbered sections are “Notices:” brief, but shockingly intense, excurses on textual fragments from, non-exhaustively, Protagoras, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Gertrude Stein, and the French Declaration of Rights of 1789. They are offset visually under their titles and are composed with smaller font and new numberings. Kant is specifically addressed across four Notices while the other thinkers variously surface as explanation or critique, again, suggesting a theoretic order that follows thematically rather than linearly.

The relation between the names of the chapters, the themes of the numbered paragraphs, and the topics of the Notices, apparently, is neither systematic nor immediately graspable in a rational, easily elaborated manner. (However, the sections frequently note parenthetical cross-references directing the reader forwards or backwards in the text to explanatory sections.) Further conceptual abstraction is born from how the tone alternates between the numbered paragraphs being exemplars of writing for the educated citizen and the writing in the Notices demanding a “little more professional a reader,” as he states it in his dossier selection on “Reader” (xiv). This alteration provokes

160 “(Pour les Notices, un lecteur un peu plus professionnel)” (13).
an allusion to the naturalness of how our thought can switch between natural attitudes and scientific attitudes (to borrow the terms from Husserl). This alteration also illustrates how the work can possess a natural, intuitive flow at the same time as the non-linear narrative fights its easy transcription.

The paradox of ease and impossibility that this work illuminates is representative of Lyotard’s own meta-thematic of grand narratives. His evasion of a transcribable, linear narrative in favor of one that weaves divergent, sometimes contradictory voices from the canon with echoes from parasitic narratives that we already hold, pointedly reveals the inherent paradoxes and problems yet necessity of all narratives. This very dissolution of boundaries as a disillusionment repeats an allusion to Wittgenstein, who wrote, “my propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)”

For Lyotard, the only possible way to re-write modernity is to explore the “senseless” as the only new possibility for “sense.” This re-writing may be a means by which he can give voice to the silenced victim. To understand this re-writing, though, we must climb through and attempt to articulate the flow of *The Differend*.

The first chapter of *The Differend* is entitled “The Differend” and seeks an elaboration of its conceptual function, which is as a failure of communication. A brief review of this chapter permits a rough sketch of his overall project. Lyotard broaches the act of definition of the differend by an example: the elaboration of Robert Faurisson’s

---

161 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. David Pears and Brian McGuinness (New York: Routledge, 2001), §6.54. In other words, his style enacts the teaching of his content. Note the similarity, here, to Hegel’s proposition that his *Phenomenology* was introductory in that it was to train the student to have the right mindset for doing philosophy; thus, upon completion, it may be set aside as the student moves on to his other works.
denial of the testimony about the death chamber from Holocaust survivors.\textsuperscript{162} Historical revision is a provocative, concrete situation that permits us to see the social, legal, and political implications of the philosophically perplexing notion of a differend. His first sentence of the text, which will be repeated verbatim or alluded to throughout the work, tells us, ``You are informed that human beings endowed with language were placed in a situation such that none of them is now able to tell about it'' (§1).\textsuperscript{163} This situation that renders one mute is the differend. Lyotard offers one definition, which will become one amongst many: ``I would like to call a differend [différend] the case where the plaintiff [le plaignant] is divested of the means to argue and becomes for that reason a victim [une victime]'' (§12).

The legal framework is productive, but must be taken as only one mode of interpretation, as ten sections later the differend is defined as: ``… the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be. This state includes silence …'' (§22).\textsuperscript{164} Between these definitions Lyotard offers the illustration of an editor who points out that a masterpiece cannot be such if it has been rejected by all publishers, for then it would remain unknown (§3). The potential masterpiece, then, is silenced like the potential witness. Another illustration he offers is of the testimonial bind of a resident of the fictitious Ibansk, the land of Ivans, in the Kafkaesque novel, \textit{The Yawning Heights}, by the Russian philosopher Alexander

\textsuperscript{162} Robert Faurisson, the French historical revisionist, as described in the previous chapter, argued that the gas chambers did not exist because no witness who experienced them has been able to testify to their existence, \textit{cf.} chapter one, above.

\textsuperscript{163} ``On vous apprend que des êtres humains doués de langue ont été placés dans une situation telle qu’aucun d’eux ne peut vous rapporter maintenant ce qu’elle fut'' (§1).

\textsuperscript{164} ``Le différend est l’état instable et l’instant du langage où quelque chose qui doit pouvoir être mis en phrases ne peut pas l’être encore. Cet état comporte le silence …'' (§22).
Zinoviev. This bind silences the witness because its premise, “either the Ibanskian witness is not a communist, or else he is,” is impossible to prove either way (§4). As Zinoviev’s character notes within this novel, “our life is made up of attempts to solve insoluble problems …”¹⁶⁵ Lyotard notes that his communist nature renders a particularly deep differend because this object is not observable through concrete symptoms, like the presence of a virus in a body, or, directly, like a nebula in the sky. There is no established and consistent scientific method to deduce the communistic character of one’s nature (§5). Which reveals that Lyotard’s address to the historical revisionist is not going to be merely a juridical presentation of empirical counter evidence, but seek to tackle the underlying perplexity inherent in that state of prohibited language.

This perplexity is explored predominantly through the logic and long history of double binds. Lyotard moves through a string of Notices on Protagoras, Gorgias, Plato, and their further re-elaboration in the legal and linguistic framework of the revisionists. The legal notation of the double bind denotes what: “a wrong [tort] would be: a damage [dommage] accompanied by the loss of the means to prove the damage” (§7). The wrong, which is the silenced state that results from an impossible dilemma, functions from the simple, logical either/or premise, “either you are the victim of a wrong or you are not” (§8). Lyotard reveals how the wrong unravels a possible response:

If you are not [victime d’un tort, a victim of a wrong], you are deceived (or lying) [vous vous trompez (ou vous mentez)] in testifying that you are. If you are, since you can bear witness to this wrong, it is not a wrong, and you are deceived (or lying) in testifying that you are the victim of a wrong. Let \( p \) be: you are the victim of a wrong; \( \neg p \): you are not; \( Tp \): phrase \( p \) is true; \( Fp \): it is false. The argument is: either \( p \) or \( \neg p \); if \( \neg p \), then \( Fp \); if \( p \), then \( \neg Fp \), then \( Fp \) (§8).

The historical revisionist’s claims about the non-existence of gas chambers renders a wrong against holocaust survivors. The survivors are not allowed to testify to being survivors of that which, by definition, prohibits survival. Thus, if the survivor testifies, either the survivor is considered to be deceived or deceiving, because either she testifies falsely or is capable of testifying, showing no wrong, that is, no silencing by an impossible testimony, to have transpired.\footnote{The revisionist may complain in like manner to Giovanni Papini’s “critics,” “How can we write the life of the Unknown Man, since the very fact that it is unknown prevents us from knowing anything about him?” But Lyotard would answer in like manner to Papini, “A foolish excuse!” but, instead of continuing, “The critics may go their way, and I’ll go mine,” Lyotard pursues them precisely because, today, we let them too easily go their own way (Giovanni Papini, \textit{Four and Twenty Minds}, trans. Ernest Hatch Wilkins (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company Publishers, 1922), 2.} Lyotard elaborates this double bind of the wrong through an elaboration of its history in the following three Notices. They expose the paradoxical nature of the double bind that logic can force, the ontological conclusions that hang upon the possibility of a witness giving testimony or not, and the philosophical and political consequences of how one speaks and by which logic one speaks.

The Protagoras Notice unfolds the vicious logic of the double bind through his demanding payment from his pupil of rhetoric who refuses to pay on account of not having won a debate, which would verify his receipt of instruction. Protagoras, however, shows him that his successful refusal of payment would be a successful end to a debate, and then he would owe him the payment, and if he lost the debate, as the loser, he would still owe the payment. The student cannot argue otherwise. The Gorgias Notice, still concerning double binds, carries the discussion into a debate concerning being and not-being. This Notice includes allusions to Heidegger and broaches the ontological connection to the logical and linguistic bind of the witness, discussed in the current project’s first chapter. The third Notice is a lengthy and infinitely challenging excursus.
into Plato. It begins with a section exploring the dialectic between the strong and weak, the double bind implicit in the charge of impiety leveled against him, the greater nature of dialogue and selection, and it concludes with a section on metalepsis, which is a reference to something by remote association.

Metalepsis offers a productive key by which to turn to a broader statement of Lyotard’s purpose in this rigorous investigation of the differend through the wrong and the double bind. If a witness cannot answer either yes or no, the only way for her to speak at all is to evade the dichotomy and appeal to another idiom. Lyotard is seeking the type of testimony that permits the witness to refer to what she is prohibited from saying. But, as this same rigorous analysis reveals, evading a double bind may be impossible. Metalepsis is not viewed productively as an oratorical device, as seen in Quintilian’s dismissal of it in his Institutes of Oratory:

Of tropes which modify signification, there remains to be noticed the μετάληψις (metalepsis), or transsumptio, which makes a way, as it were, for passing from one thing to another. It is very rarely used, and is extremely liable to objection…. For the nature of metalepsis is that it is an intermediate step, as it were, to that which is metaphorically expressed, signifying nothing in itself, butaffording a passage to something. It is a trope that we give the impression of being acquainted with rather than one that we actually ever need…. I shall dwell no longer upon it, for I see but little use in it except, as I said, where one thing is to lead to another.167

Quintilian’s dismissal seems to be motivated by a certain fear, perhaps of its power to found unpredictable linkages. This is precisely what Lyotard needs: an opening up of an unprecedented linkage to an unsaid. The witness needs a new idiom by which to evade the double bind. This need was implicitly underscored by the “must” and the “yet” in the heart of the definition of the differend as “… the unstable state and instant of language

---

wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be” (§22). The possibility of uncovering the unknown idiom appears to be an impossibility from within the silencing logic of the revisionists, but, “what escapes doubt is that there is at least one phrase, no matter what it is” (§99). That it is, however, is not enough. We must know what it is.

The second chapter, “The Referent, The Name,” elaborates the precarious state of the eyewitness to find that existence is not concluded from the discussion of it (§47); in other words, “naming is not showing” (§49). This prohibition rejects the Heideggerian option that the mere existence of the witness can stand as her testimony because Da-sein is a sign that points beyond itself. This also prohibits the witness’s testimony to simply name Auschwitz as evidence that demonstrates the wrongs it housed. In this chapter’s Notice on Antisthenes, Lyotard shows how his form of the argument that naming points beyond itself is the same as that form which argues each referent to have its own, singular phrase. He sees this as the main argument articulated in Plato’s *Euthydemus* (284a): if one talks about a distinct thing, it exists, and thus the talk about it is true, and so long as one talks to another about true things, one will not mislead another while discussing things.

While this line of reasoning would abolish contradiction and permit the witness to testify to that which the revisionist logic prohibits, Lyotard shows how this argument fails. In it is the echo of the verb *legein*, “to say something, talk about something, to

---

168 “Ce qui échappe au doute, c’est qu’il y ait au moins une phrase, quelle qu’elle soit” (§99).

169 “Nommer n’est pas montrer” (§49).

170 Lyotard clarifies this by working out the argument from Dionysodorus, who accompanied Euthydemos: if neither of us say the *logos* of the thing, then there is no contradiction. If I say the *logos* of the thing and you do not, there is still no contradiction because how can your not talking about the *logos* of the thing contradict my talking of the thing?
name something,” the same Greek verb on which Heidegger dwells in Being and Time’s sixth section of the “Introduction.” Lyotard argues that ti legein, “to talk about something,” cannot be the same as the definition of “to name something” that is permitted by legein. In other words, a paradox rises if one uses ti legein as a referential phrase (about something) to refer to something as if it were a semantic phrase (something itself). The semantic understanding can serve the function of naming a thing but to name something is not the same as to talk about the thing, even if to talk about the thing may include offering its name. “Designation is not, nor can it be, the adequation of the logos to the being of the existent” (p.37). Instead, “Nomination is an active designation, a poiein (Euthydemus 284c) which isolates singularities in the undetermined ‘neither Being nor Not-Being’ (Gorgias Notice)” (p.37). Poiein is the Greek verb “to create.” While he rejects naming as the founding of being, if naming can be construed of as the activity or capacity to create, it may yet be a productive path for the witness. Creation could not be conceived as rendering an empirically graspable object, but it may be thought of as a poetic making something come forth: a rendering of allusion.

Thus, allusion brings us back to the project’s pursuit of the new idiom by which the survivor may eliminate the wrong and truthfully bear witness. Lyotard proffers many possibilities for metalepsis and unravels their many failures throughout his work. The greatest potential for productivity can be elicited from his investigations into silence, the poetical style of Gertrude Stein’s writing, Ludwig Wittgenstein’s theory of language games, Theodor Adorno’s employment of parataxis in his Negative Dialectics, and the oratory style of the native Cashinahua Indians. Silence, another option, however disdained by Lyotard, has been broached in the first chapter and will be examined more
closely in the fourth. The remainder of this chapter will work through these other options for founding a new idiom of testimony. The division between the different options is artificial yet offers some productive clarity and the conclusion to the chapter will offer a brief synopsis of their interconnections.
a. *And* as Linkage in Gertrude Stein

In *The Differend*’s third chapter, “Presentation,” Lyotard devotes a short Notice to Gertrude Stein. He further references her in three later sections evenly spaced out to the end of the book. Within the Notice, he concentrates on her 1931 work *How to Write*, yet his comments are relevant to the entirety of her literary output. He begins with Stein’s words, “A sentence is not emotional a paragraph is,” thereby introducing the topic he will unravel by stringing together her own words, quote after quote, with his voice only inserting two parenthetical comments (p. 67). He follows this collaged narrative with the pronouncement, “No comments. The selection done for the purposes of quoting is already outrageous. Another remark or two” (p. 67). His remarks are actually nine, epigrammatic and numbered, and conclude his brief excursus on Stein.

Lyotard’s style and method of excursus, here, is distinct from any he adopts through the rest of the work and is highly imitative, or, rather, responsive to Stein’s own style. While she predates him by fifty years, there is an affinity even beyond the intellectual and aesthetic between Lyotard and Stein. He, a Frenchman who spent many of his later years teaching in America and writing on avant-garde art; she, an American who lived most of her life in Paris and was known for her extensive modern art collection. His fundamental endeavor was to seek a new mode of expression, born

---


172 Lyotard’s coy wink is even more apparent in the flow of the French: “Pas de commentaire. Déjà la sélection aux fins de citation est indigne. Une ou deux remarques encore” (104).

173 Lyotard wrote extensively on aesthetic theory and on artworks. The scholarship has largely ignored the latter writings, despite their comprising nearly twenty books and thirty articles across his bibliography; they predominantly concern painting, but also installation art, photography, television, film, and music. His art criticism concerns diverse artists: René Guiffrey, Daniel Buren, Gianfranco Baruchello, Albert Aymé,
from a selective amalgamation of phenomenology, aesthetics, and poststructuralism, that could represent the inexpressible and avoid falling into misrepresenting grand narratives. Her writing is aesthetically powered, sensory rich, and maintains a witty style while using a stream of consciousness that is sharply attuned to visual presentation. Stein, born in 1874, was educated at Radcliff under William James, which may account for her writing style whose impulse seems fueled by phenomenological observation and a psychological acceptance of the power of emotions.

Lyotard’s first parenthetical, immediately following her quotation concerning the emotional superiority of a paragraph over the sentence, reveals his interest in her work and its introduction at this juncture: “(Because the feeling or the sentiment is the linkage [l’enchaînement], the passage [le passage]. Does this happen to fall [tomber], or what? Or nothing, but nothing would be too much: A phrase, and and [et et])” (p.67). His aside, however stylistically elliptical and Stein-like, firmly establishes that to which he has often alluded up to now: that phrases beckon other phrases and that one links to another to permit a passage to or through meaning, except in the case of the differend, where comprehension meets an impasse. A phrase or sentence alone is a distinct unit. A paragraph, to be meaningful, must link the discrete units together. The force of the meaning is in the linkage more than its individual components. Thus, the question that Lyotard uses Stein to provoke is whether a manipulation of the linkages between

sentences can evoke a means of passage between incommunicative phrase regimens (notably, the witness and revisionist tribunal).

In her work, Stein shows consistent concern with emotive linkages and the powers that these linkages have to both disrupt and found meaning. Her early work, *Tender Buttons: Objects, Food, Rooms*, sought these emotional linkages within words and phrases themselves. Its style is crafted to capture the prosodic meaning of words and phrases: that meaning that is conveyed by the poetic connection of tone, rhythm, or stress, instead of by grammar or definition. For example, in the middle of the section “Objects,” Stein writes:

A PLATE.

An occasion for a plate, an occasional resource is in buying and how soon does washing enable a selection of the same thing neater. If the party is small a clever song is in order.

Plates and a dinner set of colored china. Pack together a string and enough with it to protect the centre, cause considerable haste and gather more as it is cooling, collect more trembling and not any even trembling, cause a whole thing to be a church.174

While she has not offered a definition one would find in a dictionary, she has conveyed a powerfully rich feeling of a plate. She has not used any logical connecters like “therefore,” “because,” “in order to,” and so forth, yet the passage has its own jaunty flow. The connections function by sound and gesture. An occasion is an occasional event that can be repeated like the use of a plate, once it has been washed. Plates are parts of dinner sets, which are both things that can be packed. To be packed gestures towards leaving; leaving invokes haste. Haste can be accompanied by anxiety-induced trembling, which is underscored by the work’s persistent refrain of anxious events like war and enemy occupation. Trembling can also be the nature of puddings, which can be

---

held on plates, and is also a repeating image throughout the work. After this passage, Stein moves her image-play to colors, which lead her to remark on light and lamps, before returning to a consideration of cakes, covered, on plates.

Her anti-narrative has touches of circularity that reveal a rhythm beyond end-rhymes. The rhythm of her words is also used to express a rhythm of time: sunlight fades and lamps come on, coffee and cake hour differs from high tea hour. This rhythm, though, is not evenly metered; Stein’s writing expresses time in a purely visceral sense. “In the inside there is sleeping, in the outside there is reddening, in the morning there is meaning, in the evening there is feeling.”\textsuperscript{175} Time is embedded within her phrases and operates much like emotion; Lyotard comments, “it is not the thinking of the reflective I that withstands the test of universal doubt … it is time and the phrase” (§94).

Amidst her many playful images and streaming words that sometimes have difficulty rising above the merely nonsensical, there are poignant images capable of withstanding this doubt of reason and are productive for Lyotard. For example: “Startling a starving husband is not disagreeable. The reason that nothing is hidden is that there is no suggestion of silence. No song is sad. A lesson is of consequence.”\textsuperscript{176} There is no premise, situation, and development, but there is a poignant story with these phrases that better express a hard time than if one made its mere pronouncement. But, at the same time, this poignancy is entirely conducted by declaration. Further: “All along the tendency to deplore the absence of more has not been authorized. It comes to mean that with burning there is that pleasant state of stupefaction. Then there is a way of

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 19.

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., 37.
earning a living. Who is a man.” Lyotard would appreciate the lack of the question mark. Symbolic grammar is refused and the phrase takes the meaning of both declaration and question at once. Its greater meaning comes only fragmentarily, building though the composition of emotional association sparked by the phrase’s various words.

The phrases Lyotard extracts from Stein’s How to Write all similarly infuse emotion into their respective fragments and help to intensify, obfuscate, or mutate meaning by proposing unexplored ifs: “because the feeling or the sentiment is the linkage, the passage” (p. 67). Her phrases, “Sentences make one sigh” and “I would use a sentence if I could,” emotional underscore her desperation about the unknowability within phrases (p. 67). Stein’s fear is that a phrase may be like a philosophic “simple” [simple]. Descartes, for example, proposed that a simple is the clearest element of thought, as did Wittgenstein, as previously quoted by Lyotard, that a simple designates an “unalterable and subsistent” object so clear as to have its clarity prohibit its being thought (§55).

How can one think a simple? For Wittgenstein, only indirectly by configuring it alongside other objects in an unstable collective (§55). As, for instance, in Stein’s unmarked questions, “…can you think a sentence. What is a sentence. He thought a sentence,” wherein there is an echo of Lyotard reflections, “(when A phrase is saved, it will be And a phrase that is saved, and it might be that it is gained then)” (p. 67). But, for Lyotard, as Stein fears, there are unthinkable simples because, as wholly isolated events,

177 Ibid., 38.

178 “Les phrases vous font soupirer” and “J’utiliserais une phrase si je pouvais,” respectively (104).

179 Cf. René Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, I; differentiating a dream from reality contrasts a simple (color) to a composite idea (satyr). Lyotard quotes Wittgenstein, Tractatus, Op. Cit., §2.02-2.0271.
they lack all grammatical and emotive linkages; they lack meaning. If one cannot think a simple itself, and there are simples that resist configuration into some thinkable arrangement, there is the possibility for much to be unknowable. In other words, despite her radical experimentation and emphasis on emotive linkages, it is possible that Stein’s sentences do not actually link.

Stein has eliminated all logical connectors from her writings: they have no “ands.” She has eliminated all expected punctuation that serve to yield questions discernable from answers, from lists, or from explanations. These eliminations have been her goal and purpose: to free the sentence from logical dictates, to free meaning from logical connectors, to replace logic with the emotive force of her strung together phrases in order to convey another sort of meaning. If her work succeeds, then it can be a valuable model for the witness: she could transcribe her testimony free from the bind of logic that says she cannot be alive and testify to her death, into a Steinian styled stream of emotive meaning born from logic’s evasion. This is the purpose of his Notice and contributes to the crux of The Differend’s overall argument, but it is never directly asked nor directly answered. Nevertheless, the emotion of the Notice, felt by piecing together his parenthetical indirections, suggests that this style of writing fails for the witness.

It fails because there being And a phrase [Et une phrase] is not a logical necessity, but an ontological one (§103). Stein’s elimination of logical connectors reveals that there is always another phase and that another phrase can follow, meaningfully, even while not according to the meaning of grammatical reason. However, this form of following can only imply ontological necessity, and not logical necessity. The witness, however, requires precisely the latter, logical necessity, to be able to offer
her meaningful testimony. And, unfortunately, the witness cannot enact the opposite of Stein’s method to achieve logical necessity, though Lyotard entertains the argument by commenting that the paragraph is a form of division that unites. A series of definitions begin to explain: the Greek *Paragramma*, he writes, is “what is written on the side” and “an extra clause in a law or contract;” the *Paragraphè* is “an objection made by the defense to the accountability of a plea,” and the *Paragraphein* is “to add a clause, especially fraudulently” (p. 67). His definitions permit him to draw the paragraph into his legal framework to reveal its fraudulent linkage for the witness. The paragraph is extra; to paragraph is to intersperse “ands” amidst phrases. The paragraph, as a grammatical function, ought to logically regulate and make comprehensible the testimony, but, instead, “the differend is reintroduced into the heart of what ought to regulate the litigation, in-between the law and the accused” (p. 67). Instead, the paragraph invokes doubt by the potential uncertainty that accompanies linking, even as he assures us that doubt is different than mystery. Mystery is enticing, but doubt damned the paragraph.

While a phrase’s linkage often ensues due to its embedded emotion, the pervasive but subtle allusion that spurs thought to the many possible *if’s* and *and’s*, there is no mystery in a phrase. Mystery requires a subject whereas the phrase does not, either to receive it or make it. Thus, however circuitously, Lyotard has brought us back to the ontological function of the phrase. Phrases are not individual, but they found the meaning of the individuals who employ them. Phrases call forth addressors and

---

180 “Le différend est réintroduit au cœur de ce qui doit régler le litige, entre la loi et le cas incriminé” (105).
addressees to “come take their places in its universe” (p. 67).\textsuperscript{181} This recalls and reconfirms the ontological, rather than logical, necessity of phrases. Imposing paragraphs in phrases fraudulently implies a necessity they lack. The witness requires a way to stand outside of her individuality and speak within the logic of the courts. This logic cannot be grounded by a fraudulent imposition of grammar on her testimonial phrases just as it cannot find her testimony to be meaningful if it is transcribed into an anti-grammar that unsettles its dictation of meaning.

\textsuperscript{181} “… et ils viennent prendre place dans son univers” (105).
b. Therapeutic Language Games in Ludwig Wittgenstein

While the Stein Notice ends with a vague call for a logical necessity, Lyotard’s affection for Wittgenstein and The Differend’s affinity with the latter’s Philosophical Investigations is striking and unexpected after a review of the compatibility of Lyotard’s ideas with those in Gertrude Stein. Wittgenstein and Stein, contemporaries, both promote a certain playfulness through linguistic games, but their conceptions of such are diametrically opposed. Stein plays with language by removing logical connectors between words and sentences. Wittgenstein plays with language by constructing a theoretical game to reveal unthought of connections between words and sentences. Stein dismisses this sort of logical, meaning-based linkage; Wittgenstein dismisses most philosophy as an obfuscation of these basic linkages of meaning. Both, however, are concerned with exploring the nature of linkages. This will be the crux, as well, by which to explore Lyotard’s heavy debt to the thought the reluctant Viennese philosopher after introducing their compatibility concerning a similar method whose nature is somewhere between phenomenological and postmodern.

Wittgenstein is predominantly studied as an analytic philosopher; this is unfortunate for strict analytic thought ignores the complexity and depth of his work when it fails to fit within certain models. Much of Wittgenstein’s work explores that which evades logic and rational delineation and that which appeals to aesthetic or psychological perception. Analytic philosophy also often ignores reading Wittgenstein in light of his influences and those he influenced, most of whom are thoroughly within the Continental

---

182 Although Marjorie Perloff has made a compelling case for the productivity of reading them side by side in her Wittgenstein’s Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), esp., 83-112.
tradition of a greater tradition of the history of ideas.\textsuperscript{183} A peculiar character, it is perhaps harmful to not read his works with the insight into certain aspects of his life. Prior to philosophical study, Wittgenstein was inclined to engineering by trade and building mechanical things and a house for his sister by hobby.\textsuperscript{184} Within his theories of language there are numerous literal and metaphorical references to tools and building as well as theoretical similarities between how one would approach a task of building a machine and his approach to meaning formation in language itself. I will return to this similarity as the linkage between words, momentarily.

Wittgenstein was raised in an opulently wealthy family but was, himself, allergic to money, giving away his inheritance, often to artists. Despite his financial support and his mother being a talented pianist, he did not engage the modernism of his contemporaries and his own aesthetics focuses on practice and ignores the formulation of any theory of the beautiful.\textsuperscript{185} Nevertheless, it is still most profitable to consider his philosophy to be an aesthetics, although defined very differently than how two notable scholars argue the same point. First, Jacques Bouveresse makes the argument that Wittgenstein must be considered to be engaging aesthetics, yet he makes this point so as to differentiate his method from phenomenology. Second, Marjorie Perloff sees Wittgenstein as engaging aesthetics, yet posits his emphasis on use as antithetical to


\textsuperscript{184} Schulte makes an interesting remark concerning the house he built for his sister, “… in many ways the building reflects Wittgenstein’s own personality: there is a sober matter-of-factness combined with the solemn upward thrust of a cathedral, a painstaking exactness in the completion of each detail, and a total lack of concern for the comfort of the person living there” (Schulte, \textit{Wittgenstein, Op. Cit.}, 7-8).

postmodernism; she quotes *The Differend*, “[use is] prey to anthropological empiricism” (§76) and then notes, “Like Adorno, Lyotard cannot, in the end, accept the anticlosural bent of Wittgenstein’s investigative mode, his refusal to press toward theoretical definition.” Against Bouveresse, I aim to show how Wittgenstein’s method is aesthetic by showing it to be phenomenological. Against Perloff, I aim to show her selective quoting as misleading and to reveal use as an incessant activity in both Wittgenstein and Lyotard, which concisely signifies his work as postmodern.

First, though, it is valuable to note Wittgenstein’s essentially unclear conceptions concerning who he was and how he was to live. This includes confusion as to his heritage as Jewish, Viennese, and assimilation into Roman Catholic theology and his allergy (equal to that he had against money) to British academic life and philosophy as a discipline. He rarely mentions theological concerns, although there are notable mystical allusions across his works, most notably, the *Tractatus*’ famous end, “what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.” Doing philosophy is a mystical endeavor, “the fascination of philosophy lies in its paradox and mystery.” But, at the same time, in doing philosophy, “what we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stand.” Problems, then, are mere confusions. Wittgenstein wrote his first major philosophical work, a poignant example of

---


189 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations, Op. Cit.*, §118. Also, “It is not our aim to refine or complete the system of rules for the use of our words in unheard-of ways. For the real clarity that we are aimed at is indeed complete clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should completely disappear” (*Ibid.*, §133). Note the first sentences’ variance from Stein’s method.
his desire to evade academic employment, while serving his military duty and, for ten months, as a prisoner of war. Throughout his life, he was plagued by thoughts of suicide. In an arguable reaction to the uncertainties of his own life, to war, and to psychological distress, his writings often employ analogies to thinking as being like therapy.

This sketch reveals a discordance in his defining philosophical activity, which is confirmed in the proposition by Anthony Kenny, that Wittgenstein has two seemingly different views on the nature of philosophy. The first view is that philosophy is like a method of therapy, like a medical practice, it is in order to heal, “the philosopher’s treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness.” Often, this treatment sounds psychoanalytic, which is mimicked in his *Philosophical Investigation*’s style using unidentified voices in dialogue that blur back and forth into monologues. Otherwise, philosophy’s nature is such that, “the work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose,” the purpose is to grant understanding through clarity: the destruction of the house of cards or the clearing up of the false pictures of the world. However, these two views are not excessively divergent, as Wittgenstein shows by writing, “the results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and of bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language. These bumps make us see the value of the discovery.” Conceptual confusions harm our understanding and philosophy, as the uncovering of these confusions, can heal us. Either way, philosophy is activity. Kenny argues, “philosophy

---


is a matter of the will, not of the intellect. Philosophy is something which everybody must do for himself; an activity which is essentially, not just accidentally, a striving against one’s own intellectual temptations.”\textsuperscript{194} And this permits us a return to Wittgenstein’s philosophy as aesthetic, phenomenological, and postmodern, thus, as infinitely helpful to Lyotard.

Wittgenstein’s aesthetics are centered upon use; this, however, does not harm it being an aesthetics nor bar it from being phenomenological, as argued by Perloff and Bouveresse, respectively. “Aesthetics” comes from \textit{aisthesthai}, the Greek verb “to perceive.” Lyotard argues that aesthetics is not a disinterested perception but a sensuously aware one; “what enters through the blazon of the body, sensations, \textit{aisthesis}, is not just the form of an object, it’s the anguish of being full of holes” and, further, that “aesthetics is phobic, it \textit{arises} from anesthesia, belonging to it, recovering from it.”\textsuperscript{195} The aesthetic confrontation is a powerful perceptual and sensual one that comes upon us when we are caught unaware of these sensations. Wittgenstein’s emphasis on use and activity is, thus, aesthetic; it is the sometimes painful coming to awareness of the conceptual confusions and working to clear them away.

This clearing is phenomenological. It is a methodological approach to reducing biasing pictures and aims at the description of how things really are: “philosophy may in

\textsuperscript{194} Kenny, “Wittgenstein on the Nature of Philosophy,” \textit{Op. Cit.}, 59. Schulte elaborates this activity geographically through Wittgenstein: “a philosophical problem has the form ‘I’m not familiar with the terrain,’” and remarking, “for whoever is unfamiliar with the terrain will not try to remedy the situation by constructing theories … rather, he will attempt to organize his thoughts and gain an overview—for which he may build a new model or draw a new map” (Schulte, \textit{Wittgenstein, Op. Cit.}, 99; his translation of Wittgenstein, \textit{Philosophical Investigations}, §123). Just how a new town that is reminiscent of a familiar one can make one get lost, the common ways that we use language can often deceive us.

no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it.”  

He evades any system-building and emphasizes the methodological purpose of philosophy: “we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all explanation, and description alone must take its place.”  

And, much like Husserl, he stresses, “there is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies.”  

But, Wittgenstein is not seeking an essence hidden under misconceptions; instead, “… we eliminate misunderstandings by making our expressions more exact; but now it may look as if we were moving towards a particular state, a state of complete exactness; and as if this were the real goal of our investigation.”  

That which makes Wittgenstein sound phenomenological, his encouragement to evade misleading concepts and emphasis of method and description, makes him voice a postmodernist desire to uncover prejudicial grand narratives. His incessant employment of various methods fed by a desire to avoid any conception of essence further brings Wittgenstein in line with Lyotard’s re-writing.  

Wittgenstein’s greatest aid for Lyotard is through his conception of linkages, which, precisely, is his activity of philosophy as healing or clearing away those painful bumps. While he is neither materialistic nor systematic, it is easiest to envision this mode of linkage like his building of machines and his sister’s house. Or Wittgenstein, there are family resemblances between the meanings of words and phrases. The isolated pieces fit together according to their resemblance and the correct fit hinges upon context.

---

Deducing, creating, or affirming these meanings is to play with language games. We play constantly, as we think, as we speak, we are engaged in this play, but language games specifically undertaken turn our attention to simple representations of the formation of meaning. Meaning comes from the linkage of different linguistic elements that are construed as broadly as Lyotard’s conception of the phrase, that is, broad enough to include nonverbal gestures and context.

While The Differend hinges upon the discovery a phrase that could communicate the witness’ truth, “phrase” does not designate anything technical. Lyotard is in obedience to Wittgenstein’s command, “When I talk about language (words, sentences, etc.) I must speak the language of the everyday.” Lyotard offers examples of phrases, “It’s daybreak; Give me the lighter; Was she there? … ax^2+bx+c=0; Ouch! … This is not a phrase; Here are some phrases” (§109). Most revealing, though, is his example of the phrase “raised tail of a cat” (§123). He does not intend a phrase to fixedly correspond to the actual tail, but to be an event that reveals the serial nature of meaning. The phrase about the raised tail can provoke a reminder to feed the cat, inspire studies on feline physiognomy, provoke reflections on the history of cats, provoke allusions to feminine sexuality, and so forth. In other words, there is no isolated phrase, any one phrase calls to us to link it with something preceding it, “[a] phrase presents at least one universe …” (§111). It calls to us to think about the relations between, before, and after the instant of the phrase so as to create a “chain of communication” from the linkages, “l’enchaînement,” between at least two phrases, “d’au moins deux phrases” (§57). Lyotard explains this call by quoting from Wittgenstein’s Tractatus 6.01, “this series

---

200 Ibid., §120.
201 “Une phrase présente au moins un univers” (§111).
itself results … from a ‘general form of passage [Uebergang] from one proposition to another’ …” (§95).

This Uebergang is an expression of Wittgenstein’s family resemblance of phrases. “Cat tail” provoked possible linkages to many different realms of meaning. Wittgenstein, however, is not interested in the absolute multiplicity of potential meanings, but seeks the correct meaning for his purposes. “And if we are told ‘N did not exist,’ we do ask: ‘what do you mean? Do you want to say …… or …… etc.?”. In other words, he must now play out this language game to clearly discern the right linkage between meanings. This entails following rules, which is to abide context and grammar, and verifying practice, which is to correctly use words.

Context is the linchpin of the game. “‘Look for A’ does not mean ‘Look for B;’ but I may do just the same thing in obeying the two orders.” Context would determine the correct action but cannot be taken to mean simple ostension, as if one could know the correct action by pointing to this, instead of to that. To believe ostension would work would be to fall prey to a conception of language having a one-to-one correspondence between meaning and words. Imagine, for example, trying to teach a child “red” by pointing to an apple. How is the child to know you intend the apple’s color and not its nature as a fruit, as food, its shape, or its number? This misconception threatens our thinking particularly when we are thinking about the meaningless (for the revisionist, when the living witness testifies to experiencing a death camp):

---

202 Ibid., §79.
203 Ibid., §685.
204 Ibid., §1.
Let us first discuss this point of the argument: that a word has no meaning if nothing corresponds to it.—It is important to note that the word ‘meaning’ is being used illicitly if it is used to signify the thing that ‘corresponds’ to the word. That is to confound the meaning of a name with the bearer of the name. When Mr. N.N. dies one says that the bearer of the name dies, not that the meaning dies. And it would be nonsensical to say that, for if the name ceased to have meaning it would make no sense to say ‘Mr. N.N. is dead.’

For Wittgenstein, careful attention to the rules of linkage that found meaning and context will prevent us from falling prey to these obscurities of language.

It is precisely the impasse between witness and revisionist that Lyotard seeks to bridge, thus, like Wittgenstein, Lyotard is mindful of the rules that govern these linkages and the importance of context. Similar to Wittgenstein’s critique of ostensive definition, *The Differend*’s second chapter, “The Referent, The Name,” reveals that to name something does not fix its meaning. Just to call the witness a witness does not ensure that she can be that, can be one who gives testimony. “The name ‘rigidly’ designates across phrase universes, it is inscribed in networks of names which allow for the location of realities, but it does not endow its referent with a reality” (§63). *The Differend*’s third chapter, “Presentation,” carefully lays out the differences between denominative phrases that name things in the world, descriptive phrases that, precisely, describe things, cognitive phrases that signify things in the world and ostensive phrases that show things. His rigorous analysis confirms, alongside Wittgenstein’s, that context is required for correct understanding and for communication to happen. Unlike Wittgenstein, however, Lyotard balks about context constituting evidence for the possibility of this same communication. In other words, Lyotard permits differends, permits “what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence,” whereas in *Philosophical Investigations*

---

Wittgenstein seems far more confident about the possibility of finding the unknown idiom though which to speak.  

Lyotard, in his third chapter, uses Wittgenstein to reveal what he sees as a failure in the latter’s reliance solely on rules and context. The chapter’s title, “Presentation,” provocatively begins the debate because a presentation demands an “I” to whom the presentation is presented. This revelation directs our memory to his earlier argument that it is the subjectivity of the victim that hangs in uncertainty because her life forbids her to be the addressor of the testimony, the witness to the event of the gas chamber. He picks up this debate of the “I” at the conclusion of the chapter, beginning with a reference to Wittgenstein’s silence at the end of the *Tractatus* (§135), and leading us into an unraveling of how context does not provide the truth of the addressor and addressee (§141).

The failure of rules and context, Lyotard frenetically yet rigorously reveals, can be supported by reading Freud’s analysis of the obscurity of who is addressed in female fantasy, the obscurity akin to Lacan’s metaphysical Other, the obscurity as “incompossibles” that form psychoanalysis’ symptom, and Wittgenstein’s idiolect (§144). The supporting argument becomes more clear when he turns to Wittgenstein’s

---


207 In Freud, Lyotard shows how his definition of female fantasy, *Ein Kind wird geschlagen*, obscures and impossibly blends the addressee of the fantasy, the woman, with the object named, the beaten child, who is, at once, another child beaten by the father who, himself, is an effaced referent in the phrase. Lyotard shows Lacan’s big Other to be a metaphysical alterity with nothing to do with the little other, the patient, while also having everything to do with the other’s psychic harm. Lyotard borrows “Incompossibles” [les incompossibles] from Leibniz to designate a concept dear to his own project, cf., “For even if the world is not metaphysically necessary, in the sense that its contrary implies a contradiction or a logical absurdity, it is, however, physically necessary or determined, in the sense that its contrary implies imperfection or moral absurdity. And just as possibility is the foundation [principium] of essence, so perfection or degree of essence (through which the greatest number of things are compossible) is the foundation of existence” (Gottfried Leibniz, “Ultimate Origination of Things,” in *Philosophical Essays*, ed. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1989), 151). Another elucidating passage is from his “On First
frequent example of feeling and expressing pain. The problem is that its expression in a
cognitive phrase, for example, by saying “ouch!,” implies that your pain is that utterance:

—but the toothache is painful, it’s a lived experience, etc! —How can
you verify that it is lived experience? You are the exclusive addressee of
this pain. It is like the voice of God: “You can’t hear God speak to
someone else, you can hear him only if you are being addressed” (Zettel:
§717). Wittgenstein adds: “That is a grammatical remark” (§145).

A paradox! If you cannot communicate your lived experience, you cannot truthfully
testify to its existence. If you can communicate your lived experience, you cannot be the
sole witness legitimately qualified to testify to it (§145).

If we fall back on offering dialogue as a curative to start talking about one’s own
lived experience and see if it may lead to legitimacy, we fall back on forgetting about the
different phrase regimes we began the chapter delineating. We cannot now rely upon
ostensive definition when Wittgenstein and Lyotard both revealed its many failures and
basic violation of the grammatical rules established in the language game. Dialogue
would also let us down because it would ignore how differends form when phrases
cannot leap from one to another because any linkages across these boundaries are
impertinent. For example, the police pound on your door and demand: Open this door!;
it is impertinent to reply: Oh, what a lovely door! (§147). Or, in Wittgenstein’s example,
we would call the builder wrong if we asked for a slab and he brought a bucket or we

__________________________

Truths,” “But it is as yet unknown to men, whence arises the incompossibility of diverse things, or how it
can happen that diverse essences are opposed to each other, seeing that all purely positive terms seem to be
mutually incompossible” (in The Shorter Leibniz Texts, ed. Lloyd Strickland (London: Continuum, 2006),
30). Deleuze characterizes incompossible as designating the possible paths and the incompossibles as other
paths, existing, but rejected by choice for the former, cf., Deleuze, The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque,
trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992). In correspondence, Clancy Smith
elaborates, “compatible possible things are within a possible world such that some possible things … are, in
fact, incompatible with other possible things as to render them unrealizable, hence arising the need for
compossible, possible things in a possible world for within a possible world the things that populate it must
be compatible with one another … rendering the whole damn thing realizable.” Lyotard equates the
coexistence of the incompossibles to the psychoanalytic symptom and assimilates this into Wittgenstein’s
“idiolect,” or common mode of linking between meanings.
tried to use a hammer to tighten a screw.\textsuperscript{208} There are times when rules and context fail. There are differends that cannot be linked. Thus, closing this paradox and the chapter, Lyotard writes: “… you never know what the $\textit{Ereignis}$ is. A phrase, in which idiom? In which regimen? The wrong is still in anticipating it, that is, in prohibiting it” (§151).\textsuperscript{209}

c. Parataxis in Theodor Adorno

One would expect reference to Theodor Adorno in a work considering how one testifies to the experience of the holocaust, given his infamous conclusion to his essay


\textsuperscript{209} “… on ne sait jamais ce que l’$\textit{Ereignis}$ est. Phrase dans quell idiome? De quell régime? Le tort est toujours de l’anticiper, c’est-à-dire de l’interdire” (§151).
“Cultural Criticism and Society,” is that one cannot write poetry after Auschwitz.\textsuperscript{210} Yet, one would not expect him to be taken up precisely as a poetic response to the inexpressible experience. One would not necessarily expect, further, the author of an essay “Adorno as the Devil” to turn so openly to Adorno as the savior for his silenced witness.\textsuperscript{211} That is, not until one recalls that one is working with Lyotard. Adorno surfaces one section after his comment, “what escapes doubt is that there is at least one phrase, no matter what it is” (§99 – which continues with a delineation of Wittgensteinian-style linkages between phrases) and four sections before his excursus on Gertrude Stein. He surfaces as Lyotard offers examples of the “‘modern’ style” of writing: the use of parataxis as opposed to syntax (§100). Parataxis is the combination of phrases without conjunctions (the elimination of “and,” “so,” “therefore,” etc.). Syntax, on the other hand, is the rule-abiding combination of statements, ordering of words and structural phrases and sentences. It is the set of rules for making grammatical structures.

Wittgenstein focused on syntax. Stein employed parataxis in her stream of consciousness. But, it is Adorno who most consistently, most aggravatingly, wrote in a paratactical style. Arguing for the demand Adorno’s texts impose upon the reader for interpretive involvement, Clifford Lee summarizes Adorno’s style as a “fondness for the aphoristic, [including] his disavowal of the structural function of paragraphs, his propensity not to offer conclusions, and his replacement of syntax with parataxis …”\textsuperscript{212} He suggests that this style that demands a “movement from passive receptor to active


\textsuperscript{212} Clifford Lee, \textit{Aesthetic Pedagogy: Kierkegaard and Adorno on the Communication of Possibility} (Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest Information and Learning Co., 2008), 18.
contributor serves to counteract the passive, apathetic form of subjectivity produced by modern society,” and, thus, underscores a possible source of Lyotard’s interest in Adorno.213

Adorno’s Negative Dialectics shuns grammatical and linguistic connection and convention. His style may be argued to emphasize precisely the negative, the lack of meaning. Lyotard, while perhaps more vocally echoing Heidegger and Kierkegaard, writes on parataxis’ relation to negativity, and productively reflects Adorno:

Paratax [La parataxe] thus connotes the abyss of Not-Being [l’abîme de non-être] which opens between phrases, it stresses the surprise that something begins when what is said is said. And [Le et] is the conjunction that most allows the constitutive discontinuity (or oblivion) of time to threaten, while defying it through its equally constitutive continuity (or retention) (§100).

While a phrase calls forth another phase, there can also, always, be the and that has nothing to follow it. A phrase which neither calls nor is responded to: this is the anxiety of phrasing and the central problem. In enclosing logic, “there are no true discussions. But here is a phrase (the speculative rule) which is nonetheless up for discussion. The fact that this is so is ‘our’ entire affair, an affair of linking phrases” (§152). This causes Lyotard to take up Adorno in two passages in his fourth chapter, “Result” (although, implicitly, also through many further sections). These passages are each longer than the excursus on Stein and the first, is entitled “Model,” compares such with and against the “example” by reference to Hegel on dialéktikè and Adorno’s Negative Dialectics (§152).

The dialectic is what prompts Lyotard to note that enclosing logics forbid true discussions and spurs his consideration of Adorno’s work, which seeks to invert such enclosure by a radical negativity. Within the latter’s work, Lyotard focuses on its third

213 Ibid.
part, from which he took the title “Models,” and which offers a number of phrases that all concern “After Auschwitz.” “Auschwitz” for Adorno, Lyotard concludes, is a model and not an example. An example illustrates while remaining indifferent; a model brings forth what it is into the real. Thus, reading Hegel and Adorno together, Lyotard writes “the ‘Auschwitz’ model would designate an ‘experience’ of language that brings speculative discourse to a halt…” (§152). “Auschwitz,” then, is another way of expressing a differend: it is a non-traversable gulf. “Auschwitz,” he continues, “Is a name ‘within’ which speculative thought would not take place. It wouldn’t be a name in Hegel’s sense [which would require permanence]…. It would be a name without a speculative ‘name,’ not sublatable [irrelevable] into a concept” (§152). It cannot be an example; it refuses indifference.

The following section, entitled “Experience,” evaluates this claim. In other words, the central question is whether the Hegelian concept of experience valid after “Auschwitz?” Experience, a significant idea in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit, is the “… dialectical process which consciousness executed on itself (PhG: 144, 142)” (§153). Lyotard notes that, for Hegel, experience presupposes the life of mind as a life enduring death and maintaining its being in death. This sphere “… liberates the Zauberkraft [magical force] of the mind, the power to convert the negative into Being, the ‘göttliche Natur des Sprechens [divine nature of speech]’ (Ibid.:160)” (§153). But, Adorno has prompted us to ask the question, “Can one still speak of experience in the case of the “Auschwitz” model?” (§153). Is “Auschwitz” a death where the affirmation of non-

---

214 “‘Auschwitz’ est pour lui un modèle, non un exemple” (§152). Lyotard purposefully uses quotation marks around “Auschwitz,” here, presumably for similar reasons as he does around “jews” in his work Heidegger and the “jews,” where he explains, “I use quotation marks to avoid confusing these ‘jews’ with real Jews” (Op. Cit., 3). The marks permit a greater generality and broader possible history and meaning than one, physical concentration camp can designate.
Being can take place? But, “after Auschwitz,” to fear death means not to fear some sort of eternal return, but to fear that death really is the end of both the finite and the infinite. “It [‘Auschwitz’] could not therefore be said to be an experience, since it would have no result. Its not having a speculative name, however, does not preclude the need to talk about it” (§153).215

So, the question, according to Lyotard, is not Adorno’s is experience valid after “Auschwitz?,” but “the question raised by ‘Auschwitz’ is that of the genre of discourse that links onto ‘Auschwitz’” (§153). Lyotard’s question, then, about the genre of discourse we can use “after Auschwitz” is asking, within Hegel, if we cannot speak, as we must, in the speculative genre, how then can we speak? Outside of this genre we lose our authorization by the Aufheben, by the floating position of the Selbst from referent to addressee to addressee as each new linkage is formed and validated in the turning of the dialectic.

His following section, “Scepticism,” explores the possibilities of divisions in Hegel between dialectics as negative reason and speculative philosophy as positive reason to explore whether something from this genre can speak with linkages to “Auschwitz,” that “something thought from the outside” (§153-4).216 If it cannot be sublated, interiorized, “… its unmediated-ness suppressed, made to show itself to itself, then, according to Hegel’s program, there is only ‘empty, subjective, arbitrary chatter

---

215 Cela ne pourrait donc pas être dit expérience, puisque cela n’aurait pas de résultat. Cependant, que cela n’ait pas de nom spéculatif n’empêche pas qu’il faut en parler” (§153).

216 Any such division is nearly paradoxical, as Lyotard acknowledges: how could a distinction be maintained with the continuing movement of the dialectic? Lyotard names the opposition a trace, “… the scar of a wound in speculative discourse, a wound for which that discourse is also the mending. The wound is that of nihilism” (§154); “trace” is developed in Jacques Derrida’s Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).
This chatter, like the endless phrasing that causes the victim vertigo, is the work’s nemesis throughout, that which Lyotard tries over and again to mold into something that can render its noise meaningful. Thus, he concludes this section offering that we must understand “Auschwitz” as not outside speculative logic because from within such, it would then be rendered an incomplete, invalid moment, but that “Auschwitz,” itself, “cracks speculative logic itself …” (§153).

Lyotard seems to admire Adorno for that impulse that led him to be hostile to Wittgenstein for resting in silence in the face of the differends. Adorno understood silence as Wittgenstein’s misled pressing for the concretion and rule-abiding that resulted in the purposeful ignoring of what did not fit into such a syntax. To ignore these cases, for Adorno, is fascist. This addresses the bleeding together of the moral imperative with the logical paradox that Lyotard insists upon and agreeably supplements Lyotard’s rejection of the witness’ silence as reverence for the ineffable. However, Lyotard reveals how Adorno fails in adequately escaping this silence. In refusing anything positive in his negative dialectics he refuses the possibility of testimony. For Adorno, any phrase

---

217 “‘From the fact that Adam was able to talk, it does not follow in a deeper sense that we were able to understand what was said’” (Søren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Anxiety, trans. Reidar Thomte (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 45).

218 “‘… mais que ce clivage fêle la logique speculative elle-même …’” (§153). To crack speculative philosophy is neither to affirm nor reject that it may speak “after Auschwitz.” It is not a productive option for the victim, but Lyotard will not risk the consequences of rejecting it because speculative philosophy itself permits no outside. The impertinence, however, is clear in his language; for example, if “Auschwitz” is a model of negative dialectics, “‘Then it will have awakened the despair of nihilism and it will be necessary ‘after Auschwitz’ for thought to consume its determinations like a cow its fodder or a tiger its prey, that is, with no result. In the sty or the lair that the West will have become, only that which follows upon this consumption will be found: waste matter, shit. So must be spoken the end of the infinite, as the endless repetition of Nichtige, as the ‘bad infinity.’ We wanted the progress of the mind, we got its shit’” (§154); and “‘What would a result of ‘Auschwitz’ consist in?’” For Hegel, the result of the dialectics is positive, but any result would be in the genre of discourse of the speculative.

spoken “after Auschwitz,” or within a logic as binding as the revisionist’s, verifies the existence and authority of that logic, and thus prohibits the statement to say anything different. To evade this trap, Adorno resorts to persistent negation. This maneuver, however, fails to assist the witness because it forbids the positive affirmation of her experience while pure negatives would perpetuate the tribunal’s deafness to the witness’ testimony.

d. Authorization of the Addressee in the Cashinahua

“Narrative is perhaps the genre of discourse within which the heterogeneity of phrase regimens, and even the heterogeneity of genres of discourse, have the easiest time
passing unnoticed” (§219). Heterogeneity of phrase regimens is natural in language; altering from interrogation to declaration, for example, is nothing unthinkable. It would be more scandalous to claim any system to be language if it did not embody these differences. Yet, heterogeneity also accounts for the existence of differends, for those walls into which communication crashes when a phrase cannot bridge the diversity of phrasal modes. If narrative can span or evade these differences best, is this a solution for differends? Or, is the facility of narratives the reason we cannot fathom the impasse of differends? First, we must better understand narrative and its relation to differends.

Narrative does not reject differends, but, rather, recounts them: every good story needs a central problem. The recount avoids binding them to silence if it imposes, on the differend, an end, a conclusion. “Its finality is to come to an end … Wherever in diegetic time it stops, its term makes sense and retroactively organizes the recounted events. The narrative function is redeeming in itself. It acts as if the occurrence, with its potentiality of differends, could come to completion, or as if there were a last word” (§219). The story redeems. It solves the differend by imposing an end upon it, arranging its middle pieces and beginning however best to make the ending good. Calming the silencing power of the differend, “… the unleashing \[déchaînement\] of the now is domesticated by the recurrence of the before/after. The diachronic operator or operator of successivity is not called back into question … It ‘swallows up’ \[avale\] the event and the differends carried along by the event. Narratives drive the event back to the border \[aux confins\]”

---

220 “Le récit est peut-être le genre de discours dans lequel l’hétérogénéité des régimes de phrases et même celle des genres de discours trouvent au mieux à se faire oublier” (§219).

221 “Felicitous or infelicitous in its meaning, the last word is always a good one \[un bon mot\] by virtue of its place” (§219).
Can narrative, then, really solve the differend? Can the story be therapy for the tribunal? Or is narrative the fuel?

The seventh and final chapter of *The Differend*, “The Sign of History,” includes a long Notice, divided into eight sections, on the Cashinahua, a native population who settled in both Peru and Brazil. The Notice is predominantly a review of select passages on narrative in *Le dit des Vrais Hommes: Mythes, contes, legends et traditions des Indiens Cashinahua*, a study of the population by André-Marcel d’Ans, a professor of anthropology and political sociology at Paris VII who focused on linguistic ethnology of South and Central American natives. Lyotard’s analysis of the work concentrates on the population’s use of narrative as binding their history.\(^{222}\)

The Cashinahua employ a strict and fixed formula by which to begin and end their *miyoi*, their traditional narratives or myths. This formula, as quoted from d’Ans, begins with: “here is the story of …, as I’ve always heard it told. I am going to tell it to you in my turn, listen to it!” (p.152). The story is then told and concludes with another strictly prescribed formula: “Here ends the story of … He who told it to you is … (Cashinahua name), or among the Whites … (Spanish or Portuguese name)” (p.152). Each tale will be unique, yet framed identically to every other traditional Cashinahua narrative like separate volumes within a set of collected works. The uniformity binds the tales together as Cashinahua history, “every phrase contained in these myths is pinned … to named and nameable instances in the world of Cashinahua names” (p.152). Yet, more notably, the act of telling the tale, by obeying the formulas, concretizes this history and the place of

---

the storyteller and listeners within it, “by means of a strict denomination, a ritual fixes the extension of myths and their recurrence” (p.152).

Lyotard notes the further linkage of Cashinahua history and its participants because d’Ans, the “White” or non-Cashinahua ethnologist, reports to us, further “Whites,” about the Cashinahua storyteller telling the tale of a Cashinahua hero to an audience of Cashinahua listeners. This secondary telling further fixes Cashinahua history as it situates it as a study within “White” history. (It permits a further telling through Lyotard’s Notice.) However, any further linkage would have been impossible if it had not been for d’Ans having been given permission to hear the story. He had to become a character in the narrative. The permission for him to participate was recognition of his existence; for the Cashinahua, “… if the child has no name, he is nothing, he cannot exist …” and, “Human beings are named, or they are not human” (p.153). D’Ans had to be fixed within their history and repeatable in their tales, therefore he became both “White” and Cashinahua by their giving him a Cashinahua name.

This society determines its membership not upon bloodlines but upon names, “kinship relations are thus derivable from the system of names alone, without considerations of consanguinity” (p.153). Each member has two names: their citizenry in Cashinahua society gives each one a name while their humanity in general gives each member another name. Each name is determined by three factors: gender, generation, and “exogamic moiety,” which refers to a descent group determined by marriage of parties from different clans. Being given your names grants you existence as it

---

224 Horticulture defines exogamy as cross-pollination of different plants. Exogamic moiety would be the genetic classificatory groups and would be what one would review to determine the “species” origins of a hybrid, for example, a Heucherella is a distinct plant, yet also the result of a cross between the distinct
determines your place within this network and how you link to each of its components and each other individual. Within the native population, the native name links you to your peers; the “White” name links each member as member and collective population of Cashinahua to the outside world. The *miyoi’s* concluding formula’s inclusion of the two names of the storyteller reveals the radical flexibility of their narratives to link to multiple phrase regimens.

Names grant permission within the society and found a plethora of linkages. Your names grant you existence. Your names may also grant you the right to hear the narratives, if you are a male old enough to have received a name or are a female too young to have received one. Your names will also determine if and when you may be able to tell the stories. If you are a named Cashinahua, then you may be told about by the stories. There will be no stories about that which is not named within the innermost system of Cashinahua names. “But the system of names does not engender and cannot engender narratives… since the namings are not descriptions” (p.153). Names grant existence and determine classification within the system, which details what one may and may not do but the names and the system they forge are not a narrative. To form and tell the narrative of their names, someone must not be one of them and thus be able to view their names as descriptive. D’Ans, then, must remain “White” as he is a Cashinahua.

The tale that the native storyteller tells has multiple universes within it and each one has its own diverse linkages; each Cashinahua hero will link to every other Cashinahua hero, place, addressee, and addressor — as will each new storyteller. But

---

species Heuchera (coralbells) and Tiarella (foamflower). For zoology, this type of classification would find that the mule was the hybrid result of the breeding of horses and donkeys. Within anthropology, the human groups would be divided more subtly, for example, on Cuba one could find a “hybrid” whose parentage is both African and Spanish. Within linguistics, this practice would be an act similar to tracing the etymology of a word, for example, considering the adoption of a foreign word to name a new phenomenon.
this diversity actually reveals an unification. The *miyoi’s* prescription that the narrator declares his fidelity to the tale, to repeating it, “as I’ve always heard it told,” singularizes the tale as one amidst all the tales and singularizes their history:

If every narrator has always declared this, then the story will have been reported with no discontinuity since the time of the Ancients, who were the first narrators as well as the heroes. There would be no gap, therefore, between the current narrator and the Ancients, except in principle a chronological one (p.154).

The tale’s inheritance grants authority as it demands authority to be telling it: while this question of right is circular, the telling of the tale itself cements Cashinahua reality into a single linear narrative. The telling of the tales depends upon a system of names that is radically flexible in its multiplicity of linkages that it opens; yet, the telling of the tales unifies the narrative to such a restricted circle that from within it, one cannot describe the system itself.

Mimetically reading the Cashinahua Notice as an option being explored for Lyotard’s witness yields interesting results. To argue that being given a name is the requirement for existence is similar Heidegger’s proposition of the intimate relation between being and language, explored in chapter one. Lyotard alluded to this affinity by arguing that the silencing of the witness rendered her existence conditional yet, he balked at the proposition that granting her a mere name, “witness,” offered her a reprieve from suffering. Granted, a witness can only be one who does testify, but, if she does not testify and we call her “witness” we are just making a mistake. We could also call her “Tom,” “bulldozer,” or “dead,” but none of these locutionary acts creates that reality. Our mistake does not grant her a voice. Lyotard’s second chapter established that “naming is not showing” (§49). Even if the names reveal a greater referential system, they do not
found or prove reality. For example, if Jean tells Jacques the where and when designated by a name, he is revealing its “chronological, topographical, toponymic, and anthroponymic systems” but, Lyotard points out, “these names do not imply that Jean himself ‘was there’” (§49). To show that she is a witness, she, like d’Ans, needs to have a second name: one inside the system and one outside of it. She needs the ability to stand outside of the system so as to be able to form a narrative about it. The catch: the Cashinahua needed to recognize d’Ans as “White” and as one of them. The witness needs this recognition from the tribunal of the historical revisionists.

e. Concluding Remarks

The names of the Cashinahua reveal innumerable, diverse linkages. The witness could craft a testimony that endlessly names these same types of linkages in the hope that
enough cross-referential names would form a system of meaning for the living to sensibly speak of having experienced death. Her activity would be playing Wittgenstein’s language game: an elaboration of the series of linkages that found meaning. It could profitably use the tactics embodied in Adorno and Stein’s writings. Exploiting the flexibility of linkages to determine the bounds of meaningful and meaningless phrases may permit an avenue by which to make the meaningless more meaningful and discover a way to bring the witness’ testimony into the tribunal’s realm of comprehension. It is this possibility that seems to fuel Lyotard’s continued catalogue of examples that I am reading as proposals for the witness to invent or uncover a new idiom the revisionists can understand. But, amongst his persistence in unfolding and elaborating diverse options, his writing pronounces a clear tone of failure. On its own, each option meets its own differend. Each fails in its own, sometimes minor, yet always abortive way.

Stein’s writing advances the possibility for testimony by infusing her writing with the sensual, demanding its comprehension proceeds by faculties other than reason. Her writings also fail because Lyotard shows how her means of linking phrases implies an ontological necessity but not the logical necessity that is demanded by the revisionists. Wittgenstein’s language games inexpressibly aid Lyotard’s case and reveal the rule-bound concretion of meaningful linkages. But, Wittgenstein fails the witness because there are those instances that resist the logical formula of language games, notably, the witness to the gas chambers. Adorno’s specific consideration of the radical theoretical alteration caused by the holocaust leads to a refusal of silence adopted by Wittgenstein and Heidegger and criticized by Lyotard. Adorno’s use of parataxis reveals an example of a disruption and creation of linkages akin to Stein’s, but one more aware of the failures
of a pure poetics and, thus, is more rigorously situated in reason. Adorno fails, however, because, while he shuns silence, he refuses anything positive. He forbids any phrase to be spoken “after Auschwitz” or within a logic as binding as the revisionist’s, thereby verifying that very logic and perpetuating its deafness to the witness’ testimony. The Cashinahua fuse the ontological and logical systems of linkages together through the example of their narrative, yet they fail to aid the witness because their tales are not truly descriptive narratives that can situate one as an onlooker, as testimony requires.

The following chapter will focus upon Pseudo-Dionysius in the spirit of Lyotard’s Notices. Pseudo-Dionysius’ challenge is identical to Lyotard’s: how to give testimony to that which forbids its testimony. His motivation is as passionate because his faith and religion as well as his philosophy command him. His method is of the same character as the alternative narratives Lyotard isolates. The unknown Neoplatonist from late antiquity can offer Lyotard a productive option for the witness to bridge her differend.

Chapter Three
Con-Textualizations: Pseudo-Dionysius

3.1. The Difficulty of Characterization

But purity is also beauty.  
A grave spirit arises from within,  
Out of diverse things. Yet so simple  
These images, so very holy, 
One fears to describe them.  
But the gods,  
Ever kind in all things,  
Are rich in virtue and joy  
—Friedrich Hölderlin, “[In lovely blue …].”

Pseudo-Dionysius unremittingly wrote about the power of names, but he refused us his own, truthful name. His refusal resounds as the true identity of this writer of the ineffable remains shadowed in history. Scholarship has deduced and declared him to have been a Neoplatonist Christian writing in Syria sometime between 471 or 485 to 518 or 528 C.E. It argues that he adopted the name of Denys, Dion, and Dionysius and that each version was occasionally accompanied by the title the Areopagite. The various forms of “Dionysius” represents him as a distinguished convert of St. Paul from Acts 17; “the Areopagite” represents him as an Athenian member of the Areopagus, the juridical council.226 All of these names tie him to the philosophical center of Athens even while he truly has “neither birthday nor native land,” as Paul Rorem notes, sprightly translating

Pseudonymity … indicates a belief that revelation lies in the distant past and is fixed in written texts, and it also implies that those who sought to identify themselves with the heroes of Israel’s past felt that they could claim an equally inspired authority for writings issued in the seer’s name.

Pseudonymity permits the actuality of the author to recede and his authority to issue from a useful fiction. An author’s adoption of an alias to honorifically, ironically, or heuristically share another’s authority is not uncommon throughout philosophy’s canon. Plato wrote the words of Socrates. Lao Tzu and Confucius may be only fictional authors of the *Tao Te Ching* and the *Analects*. Was the *Bible* written by God, apostles, ancient scribes, or hundreds of anonymous editors? Søren Kierkegaard is a modern master of the pseudonymous who consciously manipulated the hermeneutic depths in his pen names to reflect his theoretical stance on the unknowability of the self. His most apparent playfulness is found in his *Fear and Trembling*, where the purported author is named Johannes *de Silentio*. The impossibility of an author both writing and being silent ironically mimics the paradox of faith with which *de Silentio* struggles. Jean-Paul Sartre’s use of pseudonyms as honorifics and distancing devices, surely inspired by the

---


229 Further irony is found in the name’s origin: the Brother Grimm’s fairy tale “The Faithful Servant.”
Dane’s “Seducer’s Diary,” is displayed in the invention of editors who invent a discovery of an invented diary of a nauseous man who finds himself as other then himself and then strives to invent himself anew.

Pseudo-Dionysius’ pseudonymity may be an honorific act: the adoption of another’s name for carrying on a worthy tradition. Perhaps akin to why a father names his first son after himself, Pseudo-Dionysius’ name may denote filial piety to the Dionysius of the Acts and indicate his desire to carry on his tradition. His pseudonymity may also be a shrewd or necessary maneuvering so as to have his works read. Or, it may be the most useful way to comment on the elusive nature of his topic. Perhaps the nameless one realized that there was no biography that could deepen our relationship to his text. The erasure of his actual name, then, would be like the removal of a mediator between reader and the written. And if we want to know him, we must move beyond the absence of his birth date and parent’s names, and read his history through his philosophy, through the pseudo-Dionysius. And, since the details of the debate as to the real author of The Divine Names are already exhaustive in the scholarship, this current study will simply accept the pseudonym as meaningful for all the above possibilities and especially for the insight the unknowability of the author reflects upon the unknowability of God.  

Pseudo-Dionysius’ pseudonymity makes him as resistant to characterization as the last chapter found the over-inscribed father of postmodernism, Jean-François Lyotard. Their similar resistances inspires this chapter to mimic the structure of the last one and

---

endeavor a contextualization of Pseudo-Dionysius by means of a brief situation of his work within the philosophical context of Neoplatonism, elaborate a definition of mysticism, and then turn to Pseudo-Dionysius’ text, *The Divine Names*, to work through his unique synthesis of apophatic and cataphatic theologies and his focus on beauty and *erōs*. The initial delineation of Neoplatonism will situate the unknown Syrian intellectually in the tradition out of which he came while the definition of mysticism will elaborate the essence of that which he bequeathed to subsequent generations up to postmodernism. The task of this chapter, then, is to see what he transmitted and how it was that Pseudo-Dionysius served as a relay switch between antiquity and the middle ages and precipitated such a legacy I wish to draw up into postmodernity.

a. Neoplatonism

“From him and to him are all things”
—Romans 11:36.231

“Every effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and returns to it”
—Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*.232

---


Pseudo-Dionysius’ philosophy is as Christian as it is Platonist. This does not condemn it to inconsistency, but only demonstrates how Platonism, after Plato, proliferated into a vast flock of many-colored sheep: its many strains bear some family resemblance to one another but only occasionally to their purported father, Socrates. Neoplatonism crossbreeds elenctic dialogue with Aristotelian rigor and employs it to esoteric, religious doctrines of the ineffable. A number of studies have concentrated on dissecting the late Neoplatonists as Pseudo-Dionysius’ primary influence. Gersh, for instance, argues that Pseudo-Dionysius’ “historical significance … stems from the fact that his doctrine is the first Christian version of a type of Neoplatonic philosophy” that surfaced in Athens and Alexandria between the fourth and sixth centuries, making him a Christian “transmitter of the dominate philosophy of late Antiquity in its most elaborate and developed form.” Louth concurs, noting Pseudo-Dionysius’ “… enthusiasm for late Platonism (or Neoplatonism) went well beyond use of logical terminology: much in the deeper concerns of such philosophy attracted him.” Nevertheless, just as the late Neoplatonists are still heirs to Socrates, there is an equally rich narrative of influence to be found in Pseudo-Dionysius from the early movements of Platonism. A profitable way of envisioning this genealogy from Plato to Pseudo-Dionysius is through the themes of

---

233 “[He] was a genuine Christian philosopher. His transformation of paganism is too thorough to be that of a pagan writer expounding Christianity” (Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), 1). Eric D. Perl also emphatically stresses his nature as philosopher, “not, primarily, as a late antique cultural phenomenon; nor as an influential episode in the history of Christian theology; nor as ‘mysticism,’ if that be taken to mean something other than philosophy … but as philosophy …” (Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 1).

235 Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: Continuum, 1989), 12. The prominent focus of his attention to Plato was via the philosophy of Proclus.
Much of Pseudo-Dionysius’ Neoplatonist inheritance comes from Plato’s unwritten doctrines, which were purportedly debated more than the written dialogues, with possible exceptions of the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides*. It was Plato’s nephew Speusippus (ca. 407-339 B.C.E.), the first *diadochus* (head successor) for the Academy, who codified these teachings into that on what would become the focus of the middle ages. In essence, these teachings are based upon Pythagorean theory and expound the first principle of how the cosmos came to be as two opposed forces: the Monad and Dyad. Equally important is the idea of the World-Soul, similar to Plato’s Demiurge, who mediated between the ideal and matter to create the elements, which expands the dualism into a tripartite metaphysical system.

Simplifying Speusippus’ elaborate rendering, there is first the Monad (the One above Intellect, beyond being) over against the infinite Dyad (the Many) from which all multiplicity comes. This dichotomy produces Number, “by reason of a certain persuasive necessity,” in order to provide the “principle of infinite divisibility …” The divisibility operates by an elaborate geometry to then create all that is. Within multiplicity’s realm

---

236 Very little is reliably known about Speusippus beyond his being Plato’s nephew and the speculation that he was a hot-tempered and lascivious man who was passionate in life and faithful to Plato’s thought. He wrote on rhetoric, commented on various Platonic dialogues, and, while enamored with the thought of Pythagoras, he amply relied upon the thought of Aristotle to elaborate the metaphysical system that occupies nearly all Neoplatonists to and through the middle ages. *Cf.* John M. Dillon, *Heirs of Plato: A Study of the Old Academy* (347-274 BC) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 30-3, 38, 40.


238 All that includes multiplicity’s creation of the realm of Soul, responsible for geometrical extension, the generation of all other souls in the universe, the physical world, celestial bodies, earthly body, thought, language, instinct and passions, the Good, and motion and repose (*Ibid.*, 40-53).
of World-Soul, Speusippus claims that goodness become apparent. The good is a creative power, a demiurgic activity of the World-Soul and echoes the *Timaeus’* characterization of the goodness of the Demiurge as the “agent of all order and tendency towards perfection in the physical universe …” The creative infusion of goodness through a tripartite system gives Pseudo-Dionysius a ground from which to conceptualize his own renderings of hierarchy and agency.

This tripartite metaphysical structure was maintained for the most part through the succession of Academy heads despite their alternating, competing preferences for skepticism and stoicism and the turn to monotheism. The Jewish, “Later Middle Platonist” of Alexandria, Philo Judaeus (ca. 20 B.C.E. – 50 C.E.), fused Stoic and Platonic thought in a manner akin to Pseudo-Dionysius: “Philo built up a philosophical system out of material borrowed from the Greek philosophers and treated it in the spirit of the Hebrew … conception of God as the sole being and as remotely transcendent above the world.” In this union, Philo acknowledges skepticism through affirming the human

---

239 Goodness and all other Platonic Forms are housed within the World-Soul despite Aristotle’s argument that Speusippus abandons them (*Ibid.*, 52). Along with goodness, there is also evil therein because Speusippus wishes to prohibit good and evil from the highest realms much like how Plutarch will later reject the One from being evil and the creator, source, or origin of evil; this results in harmony being limited to the World-Soul and between realms, as he “wished to deny ‘goodness’ both to the primal One, and even to the mathematical and geometrical levels of reality, not because they were bad, but simply because he felt that the term had no real meaning at those levels” (*Ibid.*, 53).


241 Interestingly, the synthesis of this dichotomy of stoicism and skepticism can be felt in Pseudo-Dionysius’ writings between the competing strains of desiring knowledge as a matter of faith (akin to the stoic principle that knowledge is virtue) and the rejection of humanly knowledge to accurately know the divine (akin to skepticism’s principle of the unverifiable nature of knowledge).

242 *Ibid.*, 264-5. George Robinson emphasizes this synthesis of thought pointing out that he wrote entirely in Greek and likely read the Torah in the Septuagint and may not have even known Hebrew, despite his references to having traveled to Jerusalem. “He is at home in the turbulent waters of Greek philosophy that whirled about Alexandria, quoting from the Stoics and Pythagoreans with ease and owing a sizable intellectual debt to Plato. But Philo is first and always a Jew,” notably, in that his philosophic output is based entirely upon exegesis of the Torah (George Robinson, *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs, and Rituals* (New York: Pocket Books, Simon and Schuster, Inc., 2000), 407).
mind’s incapacity to know truth without receiving a Platonically inspired “gift” of revelation from God. Philo, as will Pseudo-Dionysius later, explicitly substitutes the faithful one for the Dyad who desires both what comes from God and to return to Him. This gift of revelation can only be granted when the thinker is in a “certain state of soul denominated ‘enthusiasm,’ a ‘reposeful divine rapture,’ in which the soul, liberated from sense and absorbed in itself, is fructified by God.”\(^{243}\) In this state, the thinker must make herself worthy of receiving this gift by maintaining an active repose through philosophical exercise.\(^{244}\)

This renders a doctrine wherein God is unknowable, for He is in the world only through his power, like Aristotle’s Prime Mover, yet we are called and compelled to give Him attributes as if He were here by essence or as substance. His power is creative as infinite potentialities and unified as \textit{Logos}; it emanates from Him and founds His attributes. “As related to both God and the world, the \textit{Logos} … has a double nature … symbolized by an inward thought and an expressed thought in their union…”\(^{245}\) Employing the Stoic notion of \textit{Logos} as an organizing principle, Philo specifically makes it the means by which God creates (as detailed in Genesis).\(^{246}\) Further, “… [in] the terminology of Plato … \textit{Logos} is the Idea, the Idea of Ideas, the ‘place’ of Ideas, the

\footnotesize

\(^{243}\) Benjamin Chapman Burt, \textit{A Brief History of Greek Philosophy} (Boston: Ginn and Company, Publishers, 1889), 264-5.

\(^{244}\) The necessity of the philosophical exercise to achieve active repose is found throughout contemporary Continental philosophy (\textit{cf.} Pierre Hadot, \textit{Philosophy as a Way of Life}, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 79-144) and founds the basis for Lyotard’s necessity of attempting an impossible testimony while aware of its failure.

\(^{245}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 266.

Logos also designates how humanity finds its place between the sensible and the supra-sensible worlds. We are seduced away from God as much as we are desirous of rejoining Him. It is through Logos that humanity may approach God. In Philo, the syntheses of Aristotle and Plato, stoicism and skepticism yield a monotheism that emphasizes the divine ecstasy of faith as an epistemological model to know God. This model is remarkably akin to the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius.

The synthesis of ecstasy and epistemology is likewise found in Plutarch of Chaeronea (b. ca. 45 C.E.), who “speaks of an immediate intuition or contact with the transcendental” that results from his mystical attempt to achieve a “purer conception of God.” With our “natural tendency and love for the Good,” we push thought to reach beyond the many mediating beings and towards the divine, although it is only death’s release from the body that can permit us divine union wherein we can “gaze with insatiable longing on the beauty which may not be spoken of by the lips of man.”

Likewise, Albinus, another notable “Middle Platonist” (ca. second c. C.E.), envisioned a chain of mediating beings between the One and us by which is possible a “gradual elevation to God through the various degrees of beauty …” Pseudo-Dionysius employs a similar power of beauty and ecstasy as a path of transference between the

**References**


mortal (Many) and divine (One) via an equally elaborate hierarchy of mediating beings as minds or angels.\textsuperscript{253}

The Neoplatonic theory of the monad and dyad, between cosmology and metaphysics, sometimes inspirational of an ethics, becomes, for Pseudo-Dionysius, the foundational construct upon which he builds his religious mysticism and epistemology of divine names. The One is the Creator who births the Many and to which the Many desire to return. In his fourth chapter of *The Divine Names*, Pseudo-Dionysius puts words into the mouthpiece of his teacher, Hierotheus:

… let us say that there is a simple and self-moving power directing all things to mingle as one, that it starts out from the Good, reaches down to the lowliest creation, returns then in due order through all the stages back to the Good, and thus turns from itself and through itself and upon itself and toward itself in an everlasting circle (713D).

The construction of the Neoplatonist Monad and Dyad here renders a beautiful dynamism of procession from and reversion back through the sequence of hypostases that descend from the One. This ebb and flow will work throughout Pseudo-Dionysius’ treatise. Procession is an emanating or pouring forth that can be expressed as the actualization of a potency. In procession comes forth a sequence of hypostases (being, life, intellect, and

\textsuperscript{253} This transference permeates many esoteric sheep of Platonism’s flock: Hermeticism, Gnosticism, and the philosophical commentary born out of the Chaldaean Oracles (all which variously influence Pseudo-Dionysius’ influences). Hermeticism is a religious-philosophical dialogic system attributed to the Egyptian Hermes Trismegistus (1600’s scholarship dates it ca. 200 B.C.E – 200 C.E) and advocates the One as ultimate source in a tripartite system and entails a mystical doctrine concerning alchemy, astrology, and theurgy. Gnosticism (*gnosis*, knowledge), attributed to Alexandria, Athens, Rome, and the greater Indian empires with wide affinities from Judaism to Buddhism, promises salvation through mystical knowledge via a pantheistic, idealist, and dualistic truth of divine union versus entrapment in the degradation of matter. Equally obscure are the origins of the surviving fragments of the Chaldean Oracles, the second century Hellenistic commentary on an unknown mystical poem attributed to the unknown Zoroaster.
soul) that descend from the One. Reversion is the turnabout that seeks return to the One and is the completion of the creative, active cycle.

This theoretical cycle yields rich imagery. Gersh etymologically traces emanation from the Greek verb meaning “flow” or “stream” and related intimately to “to flow forth” and “an effluence.” Iamblichus described causality as emanation, as “ever-flowing and unfailing creativity,” Proclus and Damascius name the effect as “flowing” from its cause, and Pseudo-Dionysius describes the Cherubim as the “effusion of wisdom,” describing God and His attributes as “outpouring” to His creatures. The flowing of water is an excellent, cyclically expressive image. This cycle expresses, more effectively than most illustrations, the journey by which one (be it the mystical faithful, any creation, or thought) can naturally come from and go to God.

The power that motivates this effluent cycle is desire. God’s love creates all of creation and all of creations’ desire is to return to Him by cultivating desire’s culmination in ecstasy: our own form of emanation out of ourselves and back to Him. Gersh links ecstasy, literally “standing aside,” synonymously with emanation in all cases where ecstasy contextually signifies causality. This is specifically seen in Pseudo-Dionysius’ emanation, as he “…links it closely with the notion of Love. Thus God, because of the superfluity of his benevolence, produces all creatures by means of his ‘ecstatic

---

254 Pseudo-Dionysius’ hypostases differ from Neoplatonism as he converts the polytheistic system to monotheism, “The metaphor of emanation is a prominent feature of Neoplatonic thought and described the way in which spiritual principles—for pagan writers the One, the henads, etc., for Christians God and his divine attributes—exercise causality” (Copleston, A History of Philosophy, Op. Cit., 199).


superessential power’ …”\textsuperscript{257} Gersh cites Proclus’ doctrine of potency “… as the connecting element between unity and being ‘for it is a procession of unity and an ecstasy towards being’ …”\textsuperscript{258} But, Pseudo-Dionysius’ linkage to Proclus cannot be fully appreciated without understanding how Plotinus (ca. 205-270 C.E.) chronicles the beauty of the movement of desire that animates the flow from the One to the Many and back. Plotinus’ explosion of the movement beyond its metaphysical structure provides the necessary explanation for Pseudo-Dionysius’ ultimate linkage with the broader question of impossible testimony.

Plotinus reputedly began what has become his \textit{Enneads} in 253 and continued it until shortly before his death, whereupon his student cum editor collected his notes and essays into six books each of nine treatises, hence assigning them the name, \textit{Enneads}. The work is primarily concerned with the metaphysical elaborations of the One and Many because, “for Plotinus, as for many of his contemporaries … multiplicities cried out for explanation and found such explanation if it could be traced back to some primordial unity,” the ineffable, transcendent One.\textsuperscript{259} Plotinus, however, both inherits and alters the model of the One and Many. He posits the One as the primordial, creative source of all while holding it as an unity independent from all categories of being or nonbeing because “everything is derived from it, all beings owed their existence to a declension from original unity … [all things are] an effect of the outflow from the potent

\textsuperscript{257} Gersh, \textit{From Iamblichus to Eriugena}, Op. Cit., 19; he cites Pseudo-Dionysius, \textit{Divine Names}, 712B. However, post-Dionysian Christian Neoplatonists neglect ecstasy in favor of divine will. Gersh explains this turning away from ecstasy as a “… sensitivity to the element of automation implicit in the unqualified emanation metaphor” (\textit{Ibid.}).


\textsuperscript{259} \textit{Ibid.}.
reality of the ultimacy of the One. This One can neither be any one thing nor the sum of all things. It is emanated from the cosmos as a series of lesser beings while being prior to all things. Plotinus uniquely adopts the metaphysical result that, in procession from the One, unity weakens to multiplicity, to found an epistemological model about the acuity of knowledge in each movement. As created things, our knowledge is the least coherent and we must strive to know all that we do.

The movement between these realms, for Plotinus, is the procession from and reversion to the One for both metaphysics and epistemology. That is, the cycle that explains creation and disintegration also explains why we do not know the One and, thus, offers an identifiable means by which to come to know the One. Reversion becomes a methodology for knowing the unknown. To seek unification is to seek to know the One by retracing the flow of emanations. It is my contention that the procession and reversion that grounds a metaphysical and eschatological conception of reality and his epistemology cannot only be understood as these, but also as the ground for one’s actions. To identify the goal and how to achieve it is to underscore a theological divine command and to posit an ethical maxim as to how to live in the world. The goal to rejoin the One can be achieved by seeking to know the One, and, to do so, we seek to trace back the created things to their creator. We live by seeking the godly in created things and standing in awe of their creator; it is by desire that live in this system and by desire we come to know that which we desire: the One. The metaphysical system becomes an

---


261 Louth summarizes Plotinus’ various realms between the One and before us, as created things: “Closest to the One was the realm of Intellect, which corresponds to Plato’s realm of the Forms of Ideas, where there is true knowledge of differentiated reality. Beyond that is the realm of the Soul, which is still further from the unity of the One, where knowledge is only the result of searching, and Soul itself is distracted by its lack of unity. Beyond the Soul is the material order which receives what coherence it has from the realm of Soul. Beyond that there is nothing, for such disintegration has itself no hold on being” (Ibid.).
unusual, ethereal erotic movement of mystical, intellectual, and ethical striving to unification.\textsuperscript{262}

The call from the created things comes to us as a display of beauty. Beauty initiates our desire and unfurls our love for God as spiritual and epistemological exercises. Plotinus’ eighth tractate of his fifth Ennead, “On the Intellectual Beauty,” opens with the premise that one who can grasp a vision of intellectual beauty may understand the Transcendent of divine beauty. Through the sensible perception and intelligible comprehension of beauty, we may come to know the divine. But, we must strive to apprehend “how the Beauty of the divine Intellect … may be revealed to contemplation.”\textsuperscript{263} In other words, we must prepare ourselves to see beauty. Employing a distinction between an unformed block of stone and a formed statue, Plotinus’ contemplation begins with the appreciation of nature to move to that of art. The highest beauty is in the idea that the beautiful, finished work of art imitates nature. While there is a confounding reciprocity between the levels, the method of contemplating beauty operates at each in the same manner:

The Nature, then, which creates things so lovely must be itself of a far earlier beauty; we, undisciplined in discernment of the inward, knowing nothing of it, run after the outer, never understanding that it is the inner which stirs us; we are in the case of one who sees his own reflection but not realizing whence it comes goes in pursuit of it. But that the thing we

\textsuperscript{262} Plotinus’ eroticism is ethereal insofar as he was a sincere skeptic of materiality and posited desire akin to happiness as the self identifying with the best, a movement of the self, born from the One and striving to return to the happiness of the One. Happiness is not directed or determined by worldly fortune; rather, all beings can strive to attain this happiness within consciousness: “… there exists no single human being that does not either potentially or effectively possess this thing we hold to constitute happiness” (Plotinus, \textit{Enneads}, trans. Stephen MacKenna and B. S. Page (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), First Ennead, IV, 4). It is possible to argue that it is Christianity that recenters \textit{eros} as a sensible drive by concentrating on the flesh and blood of a living and murdered son of God. This helps to support Pseudo-Dionysius’ claim that he is not running counter to Scripture by naming God \textit{Eros} rather than \textit{Agape}. On the role of religion in eroticism, \textit{cf.}, Georges Bataille, \textit{Eroticism: Death and Sensuality}, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1957, 1986), further, chapter four, below.

\textsuperscript{263} \textit{Ibid.}, VIII, “On the Intellectual Beauty,” §1, p.239.
are pursuing is something different and that the beauty is not in the concrete object is manifest from the beauty there is in matters of study, in conduct and custom; briefly, in soul or mind. And it is precisely here that the greater beauty lies.”

Confounding is the blending by which the sensible can and cannot properly discern and motivate a pursuit of the intelligible. All beauty is of the originary beauty, all beauty initiates a call to us to return to the One, but the pursuit of any one beauty is insufficient to being us to beauty itself. The greatest beauty exceeds its containment in that which is beautiful. And to see this excess of beauty, one must see its permutations and their deficiency. If one cannot see this beauty, Plotinus tells us, one should look within and gaze upon one’s inner self. If one is not moved or finds no beauty within, one ought not bother looking for the “greater vision,” for any seeking would be futile, mere “questing it through the ugly and impure.” One must train oneself to see the beauty of all that participates in the greatest beauty.

In other words, the greatest beauty, the “creative source of the very first Reason-Principle” of beauty, is the “Intellectual-Principle;” but, how do we understand and name this source of beauty that is beauty itself? This beauty is elusive because it is all of its incarnations and yet none of them; it is neither form nor matter; it is “Intellect.” With words Pseudo-Dionysius will later use, Plotinus asks, how do we speak of the “beautiful in a beauty beyond our speech,” that beauty that, in “its immediate presence sets the soul reflecting,” but not our voice to properly speaking of it? Is it, then, something we can imagine? “By what image thus, can we represent it?” Plotinus concedes, “We have no

\[264\] Ibid., 3, 240.
\[265\] Ibid.
\[266\] Ibid., 240-1.
where to go but to what is less.”\textsuperscript{267} We have no words beautiful enough to capture the beauty from which beauty is possible. Thus, we name that beauty by the beauty of things we \textit{can} speak about, well aware that these things do not match its perfection. The sensible is that to what we resort because beauty itself exceeds our capacity to perceive it and comprehend it in a manner by which we could know it itself.

We name what is elusive to our names by borrowing the names of the beautiful things whose beauty is because of that original, greatest beauty. In a procession of the beauty of the divine, “Soul also has beauty, but is less beautiful than Intellect as being in its image …” because there is a natural and right dilution of the power in each instantiation, thus, “we ourselves possess beauty when we are true to our own being …”\textsuperscript{268} This is no static hierarchy from the most beautiful to the least, but, rather, it is a delineation of the participation in and of beauty. The soul, less beautiful than Intellect, can still take “increase of beauty by looking to that original,” and we created beings, whose ugliness is our turning away from Intellect in our ignorance, can increase our own beauty by increasing our self-knowledge.\textsuperscript{269}

The self-increase of knowledge, however, is not a logical increase or linear path to beauty. As Plotinus reveals, this knowledge by which we step outside ourselves and towards this beauty, is not logical: “Plotinus was a resolute intellectualist, but the profoundly erotic tone of \textit{Enn.} 1.6 shows us that he did not think that knowing alone could bring the soul back to its source.”\textsuperscript{270} We must rely upon the sensible to lead us to

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{267} \textit{Ibid.}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{268} \textit{Ibid.}, 13, 246.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{269} \textit{Ibid.}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{270} McGinn, \textit{The Foundations of Mysticism, Op. Cit.}, 47. His continuation foreshadows themes important for chapter four: “Even in Plato, as we have seen, \textit{eros} was not so much a selfish desire for personal
\end{flushright}

163
the ungraspable intellectual idea of the One. We stutter the sensible names to try to understand and merge with the divine One because logic fails us and our knowing is still driven by desire. In this way, the metaphysical, creative cycle births an epistemological model that becomes an erotic method; the creative reveals a mystical knowing that is based in the passions. We suffer the onslaught of beauty and we suffer a prohibition against knowing the One. All we know and our desire to know are situated in the passions.271

Proclus profoundly adopts from Plotinus’ ode to beauty the emphasis on eroticism which will fully saturate Pseudo-Dionysius’ work, most notably infusing the hypostases between the One the many with providential love (pronoetikos eros).272 “Unlike Plotinus, Proclus never says that the Ultimate One is in any way eros, but he goes further than Plotinus on giving yearning eros a consistent cosmic role.”273 This role is one of providing harmony to the universe. “From above, then, love ranges from the intelligibles to the intra-mundane making everything revert to divine beauty.”274 Love is the active, possession and enjoyment of the beautiful as a creative desire to beget beauty on the beloved. In Plato, however, because eros always involves a deficiency of some sort, it could not be ascribed to the divine world. In Plotinus, erotic love has an ambit both more cosmic and more transcendental” (Ibid.). The end of this chapter will consider the how eros’ deficiency does not prohibit its attribution to the divine.

271 Plotinus’ dying words, recorded by Porphyry, captures this sense of a suffering lover’s lament in equal recourse to poetic language: “‘I have been a long time waiting for you; I am striving to give back the Divine in myself to the Divine in the All.’ As he spoke a snake crept under the bed on which he lay and slipped away into a hole in the wall: at the same moment Plotinus died” (Porphyry, “Porphyry: On the Life of Plotinus and the Arrangement of his Work,” in Plotinus, The Ethical Treatises, being the Treatises of the First Ennead with Porphyry’s Life of Plotinus, and the Preller-Ritter Extracts forming a Conspectus of the Plotinian System, trans. Stephen MacKenna (Boston: Charles T. Branford, 1918), §2).


273 Ibid.

creative power of the gods and an attribute we are given by them; love is given to us so that we can show our love back to the gods.

Pseudo-Dionysius employs the Neoplatonist, metaphysical model of the One and the Many to ground his Christian philosophy. Like Plotinus’, his use of the model is thoroughly epistemological and grounds a call to action in the world as a theological or ethical command; the theory of emanation, then, is as pedagogic as it is his theoretical base. In this light, his epistemology, is better understood as one that is based in the passions, as opposed to a strict reason, following the distinction made in the concluding remarks of chapter one. Even as he pursues the intelligible names of God, he must seek these names through sensible knowledge. This pursuit leads him through the sensible and beyond the intelligible; Pseudo-Dionysius must subvert reason to account for the unknowability of God.

L. Michael Harrington carefully delineates and describes this other sort of knowing in Pseudo-Dionysius that this project identifies as the uniquely mystical knowing that is based in the passions rather than reason alone. He discerns three distinct modes of knowing in Pseudo-Dionysius: one type of knowing is the passionate knowing that is the synthesis of sensation and thought; another type is the passionless knowing that is circular and discursive; and a third type that is depicted geometrically by Pseudo-Dionysius as a spiral. This knowing, Harrington explains, is both the line of the sensuous knowledge and the circle of the discursive knowledge at once, and thus beyond both. He elaborates this knowing by noting Pseudo-Dionysius’ reference of Paul’s possession by Christ and Hierotheus’ divine inspiration as examples of the “language of self-effacement,” employed as a means “of participating in a higher principle through the
rejection of one’s own nature.”

The effacements of the selves, here, were conducted ecstatically through love.

Pseudo-Dionysius, through the mouth of Hierotheus, describes the knowing that led to and followed from this participation, and recorded in his book, as from others, from reason, and from initiation. The first two, Harrington notes, respectively, are sensuous and discursive modes of knowledge, whereas, “the last is not.” It is, however, a knowledge that Hierotheus is initiated into and become sympathetic with, he suffers it, which is a bearing of knowledge that is born from the root “path-,” and shared by “the passions.” While Harrington’s argument has other ends, this insight bolsters this own project’s affirmation of Pseudo-Dionysius employing an epistemological model born in the passions rather than reason because it is one that is beyond pure reason alone. This model of knowing motivates Pseudo-Dionysius and the faithful to action and proposes a model of being in the world that is ethically and existentially aware of the failure of reason through the unknowability of God and how this failure necessitates faith to be a spiritual exercise in absurdity. Therefore the metaphysical model from Neoplatonism grounds his knowability and unknowability of God (which founds his method of naming God by use of God’s attributes), his faith (which is motivated by the necessity of naming the unnamable), and his desire (that which his method does, which is to speak reverence to God, its content, which is He Himself as revealed through His names, and its goal,

---


which is divine union). This Neoplatonist inheritance grounds Pseudo-Dionysius’
invention of a most radical Christian mysticism.

b. Mysticism
“Trinity, over-being and over-god, who over-ideally look into the theosophy of the Christians, guide us to the over-unknown, the over-shining: the loftiest peak of the mystical discourses. New, free and unbending mysteries of theology are cloaked there in the over-shining darkness of a silence that teaches in secret”
—Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*. 277

Neoplatonism broaches all of the principles of mysticism yet mysticism remains elusive to definition and resistant to characterization. To define mysticism is a thorny task because it is intimately concerned with that to which one can neither point nor name. Bernard McGinn, however, uses this difficulty to make a helpful distinction between the experience (the pointing to) said to be mystical and the theoretical reflections (the naming) on such experience. Mystical *experience* dramatically eludes philosophy’s capture because its very capture renders it reflection. Mystical *naming*, however, can be examined productively on various theoretical levels: theologically, philosophically, and psychologically. These varying modes of investigation can then produce an open set of possibilities for understanding the mystical experience as an element of religion, a way of life, and an expression of a direct consciousness of God. 278 The following exploration will only endeavor an outline of the origin of the term and its ascendancy to its use in and after Pseudo-Dionysius focusing on how it relates to the greater project’s concern of speaking the unspeakable.

Mysticism’s etymological derivation is from the Greek *mysterion*, meaning a “secret rite or doctrine,” *mýstiēs*, meaning “one who has been initiated,” and the verb


myein, meaning “to close” or “to shut,” likely referring to the closing of the lips so as to keep a secret and the shutting of the eyes wherein only the initiated were permitted to see the sacred rites.\textsuperscript{279} Mysticism, then, according to this etymology, may be considered to be the enigmatic knowledge that is neither acquired through the eyes nor is communicable through the lips. This understanding must be enjoined with a more commonplace definition of mysticism as an immediate, direct, intuitive knowledge of God, or of some type of ultimate reality, attained through personal religious experience.\textsuperscript{280} This experience may be understood as achieving a final mystical union or return to God or a single or series of brief encounters with Him through dreams or visions to create a continuum of contact directly in proportion to received knowledge. The union presumably could provide intuitive and indubitable knowledge of God while the episodic experiences provide scant, partial or veiled knowledge.

If by definition we mean the secure fixing of a meaning to a word, thing, or experience, then all of these definitions of mysticism concern a knowledge and its attainment that elude definition. Consequently, all definitions of mysticism emphasize the how of knowing the unknowable and almost always resort to its communication as a poeticism. Indeed, McGinn identifies poeticism as the most notable and recurrent feature

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{280} McGinn prefers the word “presence” to “experience,” arguing that the latter overly focuses mysticism on experience rather than language’s expression of a presence, and Denys Tuner fiercely insists on rejecting “experience” because “in so far as the word ‘mysticism’ has a contemporary meaning … [that] links ‘mysticism’ to the cultivation of certain kinds of experience—of ‘inwardness,’ ‘ascent,’ and ‘union’—then the mediaeval ‘mystic’ offers an \textit{anti-mysticism}. For though the mediaeval Christian Neoplatonist used that same language of interiority, ascent and ‘oneness,’ he or she did so precisely in order to deny that they were terms descriptive of ‘experiences’” (McGinn, \textit{Foundations of Mysticism, Op. Cit.}, xviii and Denys Turner, \textit{The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 263, respective). Nevertheless, here, “experience” is a productive term understood as Heidegger’s \textit{Ereignis}, an event or an occurrence, used by Lyotard to describe the ineffable \textit{what happens}.}
\end{footnotes}
amongst all mystical writers who must “concentrate and alter language to achieve their ends …” 281 Lyrical prose more effectively reveals divine presence by description because the encounter with God:

… defies conceptualization and verbalization, in part or in whole. Hence it can only be presented indirectly, partially, by a series of verbal strategies in which language is used not so much informationally as transformationally, that is, not to convey a content but to assist the hearer or reader to hope for or to achieve the same consciousness. 282

Mystical language speaks across, on the other side of, or beyond “information,” and the rules by which normal communication operates. Coming to understand how poeticism may permit the religious mystic to meaningfully express the inexpressible, unknowable knowledge of God may contribute another model by which the witness, bound to silence by logic, may still speak.

Michel de Certeau’s The Mystical Fable seeks to better discern mysticism’s literary peculiarities, namely, those that reveal what is inherent in mystical knowledge, through tracing the evolution of the term. 283 He understands mysticism to be “not a body of doctrines but a heterogeneous ensemble of discursive and experiential practices,” that we often fail to understand today because of “the historical transformation of the adjective mystique … which designated certain qualities, into the noun la mystique … a word which consolidates those qualities, according to a scientific discourse, into a single

---


282 Ibid., xvii.

place or field.” His work is a productive foil, here, because his definition of mysticism as encompassing a diversity of discursive practices and his conclusion concerning their universal embrace of passion are immeasurably useful for this project while his disparaging of the evolution of the term, and of Pseudo-Dionysius’ influence, is shortsighted. To explore the flexibility of mysticism to address secular ineffable experiences, it is profitable to briefly review his evolution.

De Certeau’s *The Mystical Fable* identifies Pseudo-Dionysius as, if not the founder of the term in the fifth century, at least its “dominant reference” of origin through the 13th century. According to his premise, Pseudo-Dionysius’ use of mysticism was strictly in the sense of being an adjective. A concise expression of this may be found in L. Michael Harrington’s introduction to his translation of Pseudo-Dionysius’ *Mystical Theology*, which illustrates Pseudo-Dionysius’ unique usage by revealing how the term “mystical” is integrally linked to his usage of the term “theology” and how this shifts the treatise’s meaning from words about God to words of God. De Certeau’s complaint concerns how mysticism, properly understood adjectivally as a description of theology,

---


285 De Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, Op. Cit., 90. Numerous translators begin this discussion by noting that French scholars have an advantage over the English, as Smith notes before De Certeau’s work, “… *la mystique* … cannot be rendered accurately by the English word ‘mysticism,’ which would correspond rather to the French *le mysticisme*, and be far too generic and essentialist a term …” (Translators’ Note, De Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, Op. Cit., ix).

286 “The meaning of ‘mystical’…is then closely tied to the meaning of ‘theology’…. [whereas] the common meaning of the word in English bears little resemblance to the meaning Dionysius gives to the term…. He does not even intend the more literal meaning of the term: the study of the nature of God…. [instead] Dionysius treats the term not as meaning ‘words about God,’ but as meaning ‘words of God’—that is, the canon of scriptures in the Christian tradition, and, more primarily, the Hebrew tradition” (L. Michael Harrington, “Introduction,” in Pseudo-Dionysius, *A Thirteenth-Century Textbook of Mystical Theology*, Op. Cit., 4).
mutated through an ambiguous process into a codified system of belief and practices. The codification of that which is ineffable is absurd and all too common in our everyday understanding of the term. De Certeau correctly emphasizes how mysticism, as an adjective, counters the implicit, however erroneous, intellectual equation of a noun with reality. We more easily presume a thing to be its name than we mistake a description for an ontological statement. However, to limit mysticism to only being an adjective also prohibits a productive discourse beyond strictly religious knowledge. De Certeau undervalues the ambiguity in the evolution as productive, rather than destructive, to the meaning of mysticism as a diverse, discursive collective.

The terminological ambiguities in the evolution of mysticism all revolve about the creation of infinite variations of a dichotomy concerning reality, for example, a dichotomy of materially versus perceptually conceptual realities, real versus imaginary, body versus spirit, sense versus nonsense, and so forth. The historical illustrations of these debates are broad and fascinating. De Certeau cites the 16th century French Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle’s note about the tradition of the division between Jesus’ real body and mystical body dating to the 13th century and how, still, three centuries later, “we adhere to his real body by the communion at the Eucharist, and to his mystical body by the communion of the Church.”\(^{287}\) The late middle ages strengthened both the division and confusion between the real and the mystical as evidenced in René d’Argenson’s early 18th century division between an existent, political state and a

---

mystical state (reality versus “a silent and living ‘inner’ realm, the reality of which eludes intelligence as well as sight.”288).

When mysticism is conceived of as an adjective, its tone can be either positive or negative; as mysticism became a noun, thus, codified into a system of thought, it carried this ambiguous tone into designating personality. The “mystics” of the 16th century were “contemplatives” and “spirituals” who populated the pages of Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure, Aquinas, and others. The mystical union was called, variously, “unitas supereminens animae,” “estado perfectísimo de contemplación,” and “contemplación quieta.”289 But, as de Certeau elliptically alludes, a bias developed in the choice of terms under the influence of negative theology. For example, John of the Cross preferred: “… ‘contemplation,’ and only uses ‘mystical’ theology to designate the ‘negative’ aspect of infused contemplation in reference to the apophatic tradition of Dionysius the Areopagite. He refers to ‘contemplatives’ or ‘spirituals’ when he quotes those whose doctrine he follows.”290 Pseudo-Dionysius’ apophaticism became so broadly influential its language was used as both proper names for mysticism and as fodder to praise or damn others. A superior example of this circularity is Luther’s use of “quae docet Deum quaerere negative” rather than the word “mystic.”291

De Certeau reviles the ambiguity present throughout the evolution of mysticism’s meanings, most notably, how it maintains some degree of reference to its being both an adjective and noun. For example, in the seventeenth century, “‘mystical’ refers primarily

288 Ibid. De Certeau quotes René d’Argenson, Traité de la sagesse chrétienne (1651), 111, 186.
289 Ibid., 95. De Certeau quotes the 14th century Henri de Herp, Luis de Granada, and Bernardin de Laredo.
290 Ibid.
291 Cf. Ibid. n.57, 319.
to a kind of ‘exposition’ of the Scriptures,” even while Pascal writes, “there are two
perfect meanings, the literal and the mystical.”292 When Luther disdains the “merissimae
nugae,” the foolish speech of mystical theology, he still ties its meaning as an adjective to
the elusive words of God, which are “plus platonisans quam christianismans,” more
Platonist than Christian. Nevertheless, he also extends the term beyond mere adjective
when he suggests it is a playing of “ludens allegoriis suis,” an allegorical game of which,
he declares, thinkers from Origen to Pseudo-Dionysius to Gerson are all guilty.293

The ambiguous expansion of the meaning of mysticism moves it beyond its
connotation to an exposition of the Scriptures and to a personal experience: “the allegory
of biblical facts … is extended to all kinds of things, changing them into living images of
the secrets of experience …”294 While de Certeau blames the enormous popularity of
Pseudo-Dionysius for inspiring this evolution, he fails to acknowledge that within
Pseudo-Dionysius’ own writings this ambiguity is present. The Divine Names is as
concerned with the words of God as it is with the very power and primacy of words
themselves. From the beginning, mysticism was a hermeneutical theology of lived
experience wherein one’s self is as open to reading and re-reading as is the text under
study. This means that, from its incipience, mysticism was an epistemology that
demanded ontological, ethical, and spiritual engagement. It concerns our engagement
with knowledge we can neither see nor speak.

292 Ibid. De Certeau quotes Blaise Pascal, Oeuvres, ed. Léon Brunschvicg and Pierre Boutroux (Paris:
Hachette, 1908), 6:89.


294 Ibid., 96.
The description of something invisible as means to reveal something essential is a thoroughly phenomenological endeavor. John D. Caputo, in his book, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought*, describes Heidegger’s “thinking,” the term he preferred in his later writings to designate a non-information and non-reason based philosophizing, as remarkably akin to mystical thought: “There is in ‘thinking,’ as also in mysticism, an extraordinary sensitivity to an encompassing presence, a presence which we cannot seize with concepts, but to which we must open ourselves in letting-be.” However, Caputo only permits Heidegger’s thought to be akin to mysticism and not mystical in itself. Amongst his six strands of argument, his first specifically aids this investigation and hinges upon “the fact that Heidegger’s [mystical] experience is an experience with language.” For Caputo, born from his analysis of Meister Eckhart, mysticism demands a goal of surpassing language for the silent speaking of ineffable truth. Heidegger, he argues, pursued “the very opposite of Meister Eckhart: a renewal of language itself,” and, “if Wittgenstein is right in identifying the mystical with that which cannot be put into words … then it is in Eckhart alone, and not in Heidegger that we find mysticism.” While Caputo acknowledges silence’s privilege, throughout Heidegger’s *oeuvre*, as the condition for authentic language and the sole space in which we can hear the call of Being, he argues, nevertheless, that “such silences as these can occur only

---


296 Ibid.

297 Ibid.
within the framework and boundaries of language, as a caesura within language. What never happens for Heidegger is that silence altogether replaces language …”

Caputo, like de Certeau, is wary of mysticism being tied to a language that fixes meanings and things and could be submitted to scientific testing and empirical demonstration. I applaud and embrace Caputo’s definition and conclusion for mysticism, as I did de Certeau’s, even while I argue that Heidegger is indeed a mystic and embrace Pseudo-Dionysius’ broad mysticism, both, due to their engagement with language. Mysticism is precisely that which cannot be put into words and thus propels one, with all of one’s passion or faith, to endlessly attempt to put it into words. Pseudo-Dionysius acknowledges the supreme silence and then meticulously delineates the names of God. Likewise, Heidegger embraces silence as the moment of authenticity and then forms his language so as to best express that which is divine in silence. And, as Lyotard has affirmed, silence, too, is a phrase among others we endlessly speak.

To speak silence or to silently, endlessly speak are faithful enactments of mysticism. Thinkers of mysticism are called by their subject matter to be the most passionate, fervent of thinkers. Their writings are endued with an urgency to put into words that which they know, yet do not know in such a way that it may easily conform itself to language. De Certeau, while limiting his explanation to the adjectival form, nevertheless locates passion within the very use of mysticism: “A semantic passion is revealed here: the conjunction of a passion (which desires and suffers the other) with a

---

298 Ibid., 225. However, Heidegger may intend an interplay between language and silence much like the one Martin Buber expresses: “And we speak to him only when all speech has ceased within” (Martin Buber, I and Thou, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Touchstone, Simon & Schuster, 1970), 153).

meaning (which is offered or refused). The secret introduces an erotic element into the field of knowledge. It impassions the discourse of knowledge."\(^300\) As Georges Bataille has argued, eroticism is the yield of a prohibition and its possible transgression. Likewise, mysticism cannot be based upon silence without its contrast to language or concern the ineffable without the possibility of the transgression of its own impossibility.

The knowledge we “know in our hearts” is not centered in reason.\(^301\) Seeking this unknowable and seeking to speak of it creates a hermeneutical circle in which the secret, the inexpressible, is the prerequisite for all attempts to testify to it, to speak it: “there can be no interpretation without the supposition of something hidden to decipher in the sign. But it must also be supposed that an order exists between the unspoken and what masks it, for otherwise the very hypothesis of an interpretation collapses.”\(^302\) In essence, there cannot be silence without the honorific attempt to speak it and there is no motivation to speak without the hidden being presumed. Thus, “anything termed ‘mystical’ becomes a mini detective story, an enigma; it requires a search for something other than what is stated; it introduces endless details having the value of clues.”\(^303\) We use our reason, our logical inclinations, in an attempt to discern knowledge from the unknowable, but the truest expression of this unknowable is a language that unsettles reason and logic in an attempt to translate the feeling of the other into words. Thus, mysticism is the knowledge that is neither acquired through the eyes nor communicable through the lips.


\(^301\) “The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God” (Psalm 14:1, which is the counterpoint for Anselm’s ontological proof for His existence, *cf.* Anselm, *Proslogion, with Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*). *Cf.* the concluding remarks of chapter one for the argumentation concerning knowledge of the passions.


\(^303\) *Ibid.*
3.2. Pseudo-Dionysius’ *The Divine Names*

“Let us give thanks to God who clothed himself in the names of the body’s various parts … We should realize that, had he not put on the names of such things, it would not have been possible for him to speak with us humans. By means of what belongs to us did he draw close to us: He clothed himself in our language, so that he might clothe us in his mode of life …”


The unknown, but presumably Syrian, Pseudo-Dionysius channels Christianity through pagan philosophy to develop a mystical knowledge unknowable through the eyes and incommunicable through the lips that wholly embodies the unknowability of God. It is Pseudo-Dionysius’ complete embrace, even so far as to erase himself, of the divergent strains of thought and their resultant ambiguity that permits him to accomplish the impossible: to express the inexpressible:

… we should not overlook the brilliant choice of the … pseudonym Dionysius the Areopagite for the author himself. Just as Paul’s starting point for his sermon in Athens was the ‘unknown god’ (Acts 17), so also the writings attached to the name of his Athenian convert are especially concerned with God as known and unknown.

The unknown Pseudo-Dionysius notes, concerning the unknown God:

Many scripture writers will tell you that the divinity is not only invisible and incomprehensible, but also “unsearchable and inscrutable,” since there is not a trace for anyone who would reach through into the hidden depths of this infinity. And yet, on the other hand, the Good is not absolutely incommunicable to everything.

---


306 Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names, Op. Cit.*, 588C; all following references to this text will be parenthetical. “Pseudo-Dionysius” also has a more eloquent ring than the name offered by Erasmus and used by Luther: “Dionysius the whoever-he-was” (Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius, Op. Cit.*, 17).
This passage provides an illuminating entry to his work. *The Divine Names* is preeminently concerned with the problem of naming the divine. The essence of the difficulty resides in God’s unknowability due to his super-essentiality: all that He is surpasses humanity’s capacity to know Him. Nonetheless, by His grace, through the divinely inspired words of the Scripture writers, and with the aid of philosophy we may know some things of Him. Pseudo-Dionysius’ aim, then, throughout his *oeuvre*, is to achieve this knowledge, however deficient, that is permitted humanity so as to achieve union with the One.

The Areopagitical corpus can be conceived several ways. The standard conception considers only existent works: ten letters and four treatises. However, the division between letters and treatises is questionable as two of the letters are actually longer than several of the treatises and, technically, the treatises, themselves, are composed as letters addressed to one bishop Timothy, presumably the same gentleman who was in conversation with Saint Paul. Another approach to envisioning the corpus, which may have greater fidelity to Pseudo-Dionysius’ intention, understands it to be composed of the existent letters, letters cum treatises, plus two further treatises. These additional works are sharply contested by the scholarship on grounds of dubitable authorship and historical existence: we neither have them today nor have solid evidence anyone ever had them, so, how can we know if they ever actually existed? Regardless, even if these further treatises were never, in fact, written, Pseudo-Dionysius references them. His reference to them reveals his desire for his reader to think of them as existing regardless if the motivation is that they did, indeed, exist or if for deception for devious or honest pedagogical intents. Rather than contribute to the debate to their existence, this
current work will note them as they arise and consider them meaningful as both rhetorical
device and as allusion to an argument that could be (or was) made elsewhere.

Of this canon, we have the following existent works. First, the Letters, which are predominately exegeses of his thought and moral advice. Then there are the four surviving treatises: The Celestial Hierarchy, which delineates the ranks of angels. The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, which delineates the ranks of religious figures. The Divine Names, which undertakes a study of the intelligible names applied to God (i.e., Goodness, Wisdom, Yearning, etc.). Finally, the Mystical Theology, which philosophically prompts one to abandon the sensible and intelligible in order to experience a union with God. The two debated treatises are the Theological Representations (Outlines of Divinity), which was said to be on the trinity and incarnation, and the Symbolic Theology, which reputedly analyzed the sensible names representing God (i.e. Rock, Right Hand, etc.). Before turning to an exegesis of The Divine Names, it is most valuable to briefly consider the style and method of his collective writings.

Pseudo-Dionysius has been called the writer who epitomizes mystical language.307 Another commentator remarks on how Pseudo-Dionysius:

… delighted in etymologies, puns, and allusions. In particular, the proper personal names, such as Gaius [reputedly, a monk to whom four of his letters are addressed], were all selected carefully as part of an inventive overall program and may occasionally provide overtones and oblique clues to the contents of the corpus.308


Pseudo-Dionysius’ delight in the play and power of language renders his style as oblique as his content. Rorem remarks, “the great challenge of reading the Dionysian materials has little to do with quantity … the complete works requires less than 250 pages. The challenge is rather in the complexity of the vocabulary, the syntax, and especially the concepts involved.”309 In particular, The Divine Names is noted as exemplar of his literary fecundity and “… proved to be one of the most pregnant texts in the medieval canon for philosophic conceptions and methods.”310 Aquinas concurs, although hastens to add that “one must consider that the blessed Dionysius used an obscure style in all his books,” most notably, he “often multiplies words, which may seem superfluous, but nevertheless will be found to contain a great depth of meaning by those who consider them diligently.”311 The most plaintive remark is the reflection by John Scotus Eriugena, that “in his usual way he expresses himself in an involved and distorted language, and therefore many find him extremely obscure and difficult to understand.”312 The following exegesis of The Divine Names, then, will carefully consider his obscurity as a meaningful contribution to his philosophy by carefully noting terminology and rigorously interpreting his technique. His style will be considered as it assists his method of the radical conjunction of apophatic and cataphatic theologies and enhances his focus upon Beauty and Love as particularly revelatory names for God.


a. Naming Names

Each of *The Divine Names*’ thirteen chapters has a title, which may or may not be later editorial additions, as noted by the co-translators Colm Luibheid and Rorem, who reference the dearth of systematic study of this question. The title of chapter one begins with a dedication: “Dionysius the Elder to Timothy the Fellow-Elder: What the goal of this discourse is, and the tradition regarding the divine names” (585A). Terminological clarification of the address presents an interesting interpretive insight to the treatise. The frame for the work is that Pseudo-Dionysius, as “the Elder,” a presbyter, is writing an instructive letter to Timothy. While named “Fellow-Elder,” it is clear from the tone of all four existent treatises that Timothy is a junior colleague. Thus, Pseudo-Dionysius positions himself (or an editor does so on his behalf) as a teacher akin to the relationship between Paul and Dionysius in the Acts. The goal, mentioned in the chapter’s title, is not concisely stated until the seventh chapter: “If God cannot be grasped by mind or sense-perception, if he is not a particular being, how do we know him?” (869C). The tradition of how we go about knowing God, then, and how Pseudo-Dionysius will augment this tradition will be the emphasis of the first chapter and summarized by the methodological mantra: “through knowledge and through unknowing” (872A).

Within the first sentence of the chapter, Pseudo-Dionysius informs us that this work conceptually follows from the (questionably existent) *Theological Representations*, summarized several pages later as concerning the procession of God from simplicity to plurality. He also states that *Symbolic Theology* (also potentially fictitious) will follow after *The Divine Names*. His genealogy around the sandwiched treatise defies a certain

---

313 *The Theological Representations* is also summarized at 593B-C.
chronological comprehension while, nevertheless, offering an informative framework: to know the names of God is the endeavor of the work that follows from a delineation of His creative powers and precedes the mundane modes of knowing Him.

Here, though, we explore the divine names by which we call Him, although Pseudo-Dionysius cautions us immediately not to surpass the truth of what can be said about the unknown, that “we must not dare to resort to words or conceptions concerning that hidden divinity which transcends being, apart from what the sacred scriptures have divinely revealed” (588A). The Scripture writers, who were graced with a power to say more than what normal human wisdom is permitted, shall be the source of these names. God’s knowability and unknowability are both solidly affirmed by the terminology within the first section of this first chapter: He “transcends being,” is “beyond being,” “beyond speech, mind, or being itself,” demands an “understanding beyond being,” is “infinity beyond being,” “beyond intelligence,” is the “inscrutable One,” the “inexpressible Good,” “mind beyond mind,” and the “word beyond speech” (588A-B).

Within this first segment of text, we have been introduced to a certain theological disposition. The authority of the Scriptures is established straightforwardly and the Neoplatonist inheritance is acknowledged implicitly. The names delineated above and supplemented with “One,” “Cause,” “Source of all unity,” and “supra-existent Being,” reveal a blending of Christian and Neoplatonist philosophies (588B). Textual evidence for these names could be from Plotinus or Proclus as easily as from the Scriptures, to which he claims to limit himself. One clearly Platonic reference is that divine truth is “revealed to each mind in proportion to its capacities …” (588A).314

314 Cf., Plato, Phaedrus 246a-50c, he delineates how souls will be embodied as determined by the degree of the Forms appreciated, in turn, determined by one’s capacity of moderation and philosophical cultivation.
If God were as inscrutable as the numerous names above suggest, however, there would be little further truthful text in his treatise. An investigation of divine names is not, nor can it be, a dictionary of names. The knowable must be brought into balance with the unknowable; every name must affirm a scrap of knowledge that we have about God and every name must reject that scrap as essentially inadequate knowledge. “There is no name for it [God] nor expression. We cannot follow it into its inaccessible dwelling place so far above us and we cannot even call it by the name of goodness” (981A). Thus, just as God is “… invisible and incomprehensible … ‘unsearchable and inscrutable,’” and, at once, “not absolutely incommunicable to everything” (588C), Pseudo-Dionysius’ method must speak and un-speak everything, it must affirm each name of God as it denies each name. Ultimately, it is only God, in grace, who grants us “a firm, transcendent beam, granting enlightenment,” in proportion to each person’s capacity or allotment, so as to draw “sacred minds upward to its permitted contemplation,” and, if permitted, to “participation,” or divine union (588D).

Pseudo-Dionysius’ use of light and dark imagery for knowing and unknowing will be seen repeatedly throughout the work, hearkening Plato’s allegory of the cave with the shadowed underworld of unknowing and the higher ground with its blinding sun as the light of reason that can illuminate truth. Hearkening Plato’s metaphor of the soul as winged horses and charioteer, the enlightened minds “with a love matching the illuminations granted them … take flight, reverently, wisely, in all holiness” (589A). Diverging from Plato, however, is Pseudo-Dionysius’ rigorously mystical insistence on the unknowability of God, or, how He is “out of the reach of every rational process” (588B). This claim is interesting, though, and misleading. Just as Plato’s affirmation of
reason never neglects the important role of desire, Pseudo-Dionysius’ affirmation of the unknowability likewise does not resolutely neglect reason. God may be unknowable, but he is, nonetheless, endeavoring a systematic examination and justification of every name of God so as to attain some degree of knowledge. While this endeavor is motivated by desire and its activity is honorific, it is also an implicit affirmation of the power of reason.

Pseudo-Dionysius further delineates predominant themes he inherited from Neoplatonism and works to ascribes them to the Scriptures. In brief, these include “scriptural utterances” about the procession of God, his being a monad or henad, its form as a trinity, its form as Cause of all that is, its sacred beauty, and its loving nature (589D-592A). These utterances come to us “wrapped in sacred veils of that love toward humanity” and we respond by envisioning the Transcendent “clothed in the terms of being” (592B). Until we achieve a union with Him, we will not be able to think him otherwise than in the terms by which we think earthly things. Until then, and in order to achieve that union, “we use whatever appropriate symbols we can for the things of God” (592C). Immediately after this long reflection on how we speak about the unknowable God, he asks, “How then can we speak of the divine names” (593A)?

How? By speaking and unspeaking His names. In other words, Pseudo-Dionysius will radically conjoin cataphatic (affirmative) and apophatic (negative) theologies. In his Mystical Theology, he writes, “Why, you ask, do we begin the divine clearing off from the last of all, when we set down the settings starting from the most outstanding?”

To “set down” or “affirm” a name, methodologically, is affirmative theology; to “clear off” the name is to erase it, negate it, and, methodologically,
negative theology. When the names are spoken, they must then be unspoken because no name that we know can be appropriate to name He who surpasses our possible knowing.

Andrew Louth, in his work *Denys the Areopagite*, explains how Pseudo-Dionysius’ method is clearly situated in Neoplatonist theories of emanation and naming God, but also how it differs. This difference is predominately found in the unique balance of both affirmation and negation concerning a singular source:

For Denys, however, the reference of both apophatic and cataphatic theology is the One God: they are apparently contradictory or paradoxical. It is of the same God that we are to make both affirmations and denials. Denys has, as it were, identified the hypotheses of the *Parmenides* … What Procline Neoplatonism kept, logically and ontologically apart, Denys brings together in stark paradox.316

The juxtaposition of Pseudo-Dionysius and Plato’s *Parmenides* is profitable. Plato’s dialogue posits the first hypothesis as identifying the One of whom nothing can be spoken. Pseudo-Dionysius posits the first as the “Transcendent [who] surpasses all discourse …” (593A). Plato’s second hypothesis acknowledges the manifestations of the divine that can be spoken. Pseudo-Dionysius’ second acknowledges the “Good [who] is not absolutely incommunicable to everything” (588C). However, for Pseudo-Dionysius and against the *Parmenides* and its Neoplatonist interpretation, the two counter hypotheses productively refer to a singular reality. Paul Rorem affirms, “… the ‘divine names’ are all considered attributes of God, not names for hypostases (gods or henads) that depend upon the ultimate One, as in previous Neoplatonic interpretations of divine predicates or names.”317


Pseudo-Dionysius uses both affirmation and denial to name God, although his full argumentation as to why and how he only cursorily explains, suggesting that he has already done so in his *Theological Representations*. Instead of re-exhausting the argument, he only repeats his formula that while we cannot know that which is beyond being, we can speak of it because of the precedent of those divinized minds who can speak truthfully about the ineffable: “… the godlike unified minds who imitate these angels as far as possible praise it most appropriately through the denial of all beings” (593C). His non-argument, however, contains a clear example of his apophaticism: it is through the negation of being that we can speak about the being beyond being. Through the denial of being comes forth its affirmation:

… no lover of the truth which is above all truth will seek to praise it as word or power or mind or life or being. No. It is at a total remove…. And yet, since it is the underpinning of goodness, and by merely being there is the cause of everything, to praise this divinely beneficent Providence you must turn to all of creation (593C-D).

We cannot speak of God so we speak of God by unspeaking what we speak. We copy our speech from that speech from those divine-like minds who have, through His grace, experienced a greater degree of union with Him so as to “know” He is incomprehensible and beyond all that can be known and speak of Him by denying all beings.

We copy their denial to affirm Him. Our mimesis is motivated by our longing to praise Him who cannot be praised. Thus, in like form, we praise Him by praising all that He has made and denying that He is all that He made. We are impertinent, speaking praises we know do not match His glory, but we do so because “all things long for it. The intelligent and rational long for it by way of knowledge, the lower strata by way of perception, the remainder by way of the stirrings of being alive and in whatever fashion
befits their condition” (593D). Desire may have gotten us kicked out of the Garden but, now, our immense desire is acknowledged as honorific, even if a bit impertinent. Aware of our impossibility of actually knowing God, we still so long for Him that we name him in our incomplete and darkened ways. While Pseudo-Dionysius does not cite 1 Corinthians 13:9, it is a beautiful expression of this incomplete knowing:

> For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.  

Nearly concluding the chapter is a furious survey of roughly one hundred names of God in the Scriptures. These names cover every range of created thing: from being and life to truth and word, from still breeze and dew to feet and crown, and from cups to mixing bowls. Nestled within this tirade of names is his crucial, yet brief addendum to why we can name Him: “And so it is that as Cause of all and as transcending all, he is rightly nameless and yet has the names of everything that is” (596C). As Creator, He is “their cause, their source, and their destiny” (596C). As this origin, He “actually contains everything beforehand within itself…. Hence the songs of praise and the names for it are fittingly derived from the sum total of creation” (597A). Because all is, first, in God,

---

318 Pseudo-Dionysius may or may not hazily invoke this passage in his *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*’s section on “Contemplation,” 397A-B. An inspiration born from this passage is Ingmar Bergman’s 1961 film entitled “Through a Glass, Darkly,” which beautifully personifies the rationalist’s reaction to this mystical goal as it unfolds the story of a young wife who spends countless nights trying to discern the mumblings of God through the wall of an abandoned room in her attic until his revelation of Himself to her (as a giant spider) sends her into a fit and her husband once more commits her as psychotic to a hospital.

319 Selected Scriptural references, respectively: Ex 3:14, Jn 11:25, Jn 14:6, Jn 1:1, Wis 7:27, Is 18:4, Ex 24:10, Rv 14:14, Ps 75:8, and Prv 9:2. Mixing bowls, receptacles for blending holy nourishment, reappear in an existent letter and are described as “being round and uncovered … a symbol of the Providence which has neither a beginning nor an end, which is open to all and encompasses all” (Pseudo-Dionysius, “Letter Nine: To Titus the Hierarch,” in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works, Op. Cit.*, 1109B).
before it is outside, created and in creation, it is justified that the names of all creation are also rightly applied to Him. Pseudo-Dionysius ends the chapter with a tone of severity and intrigue through a warning and prayer. He warns his good Timothy to guard this knowledge as by divine command and never divulge this information to the uninitiated, and he offers a beseeching prayer for God never to take away his ability to praise Him, the “unutterable and unnameable Deity,” through His divine names (597C).
b. Good and Light

Chapter one introduced the plethora of possible names and the fourth chapter then concerns itself with some of the most important. Chapter four is entitled: “Concerning ‘good,’ ‘light,’ ‘beautiful,’ ‘love,’ ‘ecstasy,’ and ‘zeal’; and that evil is neither a being, nor from a being, nor in beings” (693A). This chapter transitions the treatise from theoretical exposition to application: to the actual endeavor of understanding the divine names of God. The name Good occupies an important position, “which the sacred writers have preeminently set apart for the supra-divine God from all other names” (693B). The Good is what accounts for all goodness in all things in a manner he likens to how the sun, without rational process, extends light into the world (693B). There is a procession downward of this goodness. Pure Minds, angels, that is, owe their presence to this light of goodness from God, and “their longing for the Good makes them what they are and confers on them their well-being. Shaped by what they yearn for, they exemplify goodness and, as the Law of God requires of them, they share with those below them the good gifts which have come their way” (693C-96A). Pseudo-Dionysius refers to these angels as “messengers of the divine source,” and gives them the capacity to “lift up the lower to the higher” and “enable the superiors to come down to the level of those beneath them …” (696B). The hierarchy below these Minds proceeds to the Souls, which designates humanity, then those irrational souls or creatures, plants, and finally objects (696C-D). The hierarchy does not diverge widely from that at work in Plato, Aristotle, or the Neoplatonists. The procession and reversion operates as an inheritance of existence from the Good at the highest tier, which is dissimulated down to creation and then initiates a return by creations’ longing for assimilation back into those upper echelons.
All creation strives to be like the goodness it has received. The Good, itself, transcends everything yet creates everything because, “in its nonbeing [it is] really an excess of being,” and in everything He forms, He instills the desire to be with the formless (697A).

A curious addition to this dynamic interrelation is Pseudo-Dionysius’ comment, “and one might even say that nonbeing itself longs for the Good which is above all being. Repelling being, it struggles to find rest in the Good which transcends all being, in the sense of a denial of all things” (697A). While Pseudo-Dionysius doesn’t offer any further comment on his interesting remark, it is striking to note how superlative he is casting the Good so that even that with no soul is vivified with desire for the Good. Pseudo-Dionysius may acknowledge the radicality of his statement by so abruptly moving to elaborate his hierarchy of creation by addressing the Good as Cause of the heavens, space, time, and light, awkwardly transitioning away from the privilege of desire in nonbeing by the mildly humorous remark, “in my concern for other matters I forgot to say that the Good is the Cause even for the sources and the frontiers of the heavens …” (697B).

As creator of the heavens, God is also responsible for celestial movements, light, and its resultant enumeration of time (700A). Light is a persistent theme and is now addressed as a proper name for the divine: “the Good is also praised by the name ‘Light’” (697C). In case Light seems less dignified than Good, Pseudo-Dionysius quickly notes that divine names will come from across the entire range of creation, “from the highest

---

320 Jean-Luc Marion notes the radicality of Pseudo-Dionysius’ insistence, “without reservation,” on the “audacity of his thesis” of the good, given by God, surpassing all being to degree that it even encourages nonbeing itself to tend towards the Good as God (Marion, God without Being, Op. Cit., 76). Marion addresses the justifications, namely by Aquinas, that Pseudo-Dionysius intends to name matter without form, rather than non-being, although Marion, himself, repeatedly intonates his own skepticism (“… one still would have to wonder …” (Ibid., 77)), pointing to Pseudo-Dionysius’ use of onta and Aquinas’ use of esse to support the former’s radicalism (Ibid., 77-8). The full extremism, however, of Pseudo-Dionysius’ interpretation of desire has yet to be revealed.
and most perfect forms of being to the very lowest…. superior to the highest and stretching out to the lowliness” (697C). He illustrates the fittingness of this name by likening God to the Sun, “it illuminates whatever is capable of receiving its light and yet it never loses the utter fullness of its light” (697D), and finally makes the metaphor more conceptual noting that “the Good is described as the light of the mind because it illuminates the mind of every supra-celestial being with the light of the mind, and because it drives from souls the ignorance and the error squatting there” (700D).

Making the name hearken both physical and metaphorical light, Pseudo-Dionysius is alluding to and, interestingly, reversing the Platonic responsibility of the captive to become accustomed reason’s glare to light being a tender gift given by the grace of the divine. For Pseudo-Dionysius, God:

\[
\text{deals out light in small amounts and then, as the wish and the longing for light begin to grow, it gives more and more of itself, shining ever more abundantly on them because they ‘loved much,’ and always it keeps urging them onward and upward as their capacity permits (701A).}
\]

Pseudo-Dionysius’ Light is gentle; it seduces the attention and love of darkened souls. Plato’s light comes as a violent assault that hurts, blinds, and instills reverent fear into the deluded prisoner. Pseudo-Dionysius concludes, invoking the gentler pedagogue of Plato’s \textit{Cratylus}, by pronouncing that the sun “makes all things a ‘sum’ and gathers together the scattered (700b-c).”\footnote{\textit{The origin of the sun will probably be clearer in the Doric form, for the Doriens call him "αλιος, and this name is given to him because when he rises he gathers (αλ’ιζοι) men together …" (Plato, \textit{Cratylus}, trans. Benjamin Jowett, in \textit{Plato: The Collected Dialogues}, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 409a). Further reference to the \textit{Cratylus} is with the verbal play on kallos and kaleo (\textit{Cratylus}, 416c and \textit{The Divine Names}, 701C-D) and about the existence of an absolute beauty (\textit{Cratylus}, 439c-e).}}
c. Beauty and Eros

This tonal shift toward seduction and from violence is further discernable in the next two names for the divine: Beauty and Yearning, Kallos and Eros. Beauty bids [kallos] to us, gathers all things together like the collection by the Good (701C-D), as is well noted by Plato and throughout his intellectual legacy. Pseudo-Dionysius’ Greek inheritance is also made apparent in his linkage between beauty and harmony. The aesthetics of harmony inspire him to reflect on the arcs rendered by the movement of creation and the heavens, which invokes the Neoplatonist image of the flow of emanation (704A, 704D-705B). Beauty does not, however, remain an abstract invocation. Just as the good in the lowliest forms was from and directed our attention to the Good by which it was created, beauty is acknowledged in all its forms. This parallel actually becomes a synthesis of the two: “the Beautiful is therefore the same as the Good” (704B). Merging the two and offering an allusion that could point equally to Plato’s Symposium or Cratylus, Pseudo-Dionysius affirms that all that is beautiful, ultimately, is the eternal beauty. The eternal beauty “is the cause of harmony, of sympathy, of community” that

---

322 Pseudo-Dionysius intends and primarily uses the term eros, although, other terms for love do appear, as John Dixon Copp points out, “Agape does appear in Dionysius, about eight times in all his pages, and translators into English have tended to translated with ‘loving care.’ Agape becomes the expression of love rather than love (eros) as a name of God to be meditated upon” (John Dixon Copp, Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite: Man of Darkness/Man of Light (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), 52.


325 Pseudo-Dionysius writes: “It is not beautiful in one place and not so in another, as though it could be beautiful for some and not for others. Ah no. In itself and by itself, it is the uniquely and the eternally beautiful” (704A). Note the similarities between Pseudo-Dionysius’ account and that within Plato’s
powerfully “bestirs the world and holds all things in existence by the longing inside them to have beauty” (704A). Beauty either initiates desire or is desire. “And there it is ahead of all as Goal, as the Beloved, as the Cause toward which all things move, since it is the longing for beauty which actually beings them into being. It is a model to which they conform” (704B). Beauty inspires communion. This communion invokes, once more, a reversion to an originary source. All is from beauty and all “return upward” (704B).

Echoing the non-contradiction between unity and differentiation in his second chapter, he re-emphasizes that creation, by procession, is a differentiation of all things, yet reversion returns all things to identity, to reveal the “innate togetherness of everything…. the intermingling of everything, the persistence of things, the unceasing emergence of things” (704C).

All created things participate; and even those things that are not share in Beauty: “And I would even be so bold as to claim that nonbeing also shares in the Beautiful and the Good, because nonbeing, when applied transcendently to God in the sense of a denial of all things, is itself beautiful and good” (704B). Pseudo-Dionysius’ bold claim is a peculiar one. The inclusion of nonbeing into participation with beauty suggests that it also turns towards beauty, which contradicts his apparent equation between nonbeing and the turning away from and denial of all things. For desire to compel even the ascetic to participation with the beautiful renders this desire an immeasurably powerful force and a
radically new religious insight. Yet, however bold this claim may about the all-pervasiveness of desire, even by nonbeing, for the Beautiful, it pales in comparison to Pseudo-Dionysius’ consequent assertion. Beauty is so beautiful and desire is so powerful a force that even the Creator Himself falls prey to its charms:

And we may be so bold as to claim also that the Cause of all things loves all things in the superabundance of his goodness, that because of this goodness he makes all things, brings all things to perfection, holds all things together and returns all things (708A-B).

God, too, yearns by nature of His goodness; “The divine longing is Good seeking good for the sake of the Good” (708B). His yearning is creative and beckons to us as our curative; “and so it is that all things must desire, must yearn for, must love, the Beautiful and the Good” (708A). All things must desire the Good, even the Good, Himself.

Soothing his “we may be so bold,” Pseudo-Dionysius adds that “Let no one imagine that in giving status to the term ‘yearning’ I am running counter to scripture” (708B). His claim, though, is a challenging one to support; this project necessitates that it be neither a blasphemous name for God nor one too mundane. The complete diagnosis of his radicalism of discerning Yearning as a name for God and characterizing our relation to God as erotic will be the concern of the following chapter; here, it is important to note only two important features. First, the divine name Yearning is a translation of *eros*, as opposed to *agape*, the more sanitized instantiation of desire (cleansed of both sexual and Neoplatonist, pagan suggestions). Yearning maintains its overtones of explicit sensuality, eroticism, and Neoplatonism. These allusions are bolstered throughout his investigation into the name, for example, by his rewriting of the Septuagint’s “lovely verse” in two Samuel 1:26, “Love for you came on me like love for women” (709C). As this emphasizes, *eros* is the most intense instantiation of love: “The power in dynamic
love (eros) for the ‘upward striving toward the Divine’ that the Greeks taught ought still be present in a fully understood eros.”

Maximus Confessor argued a notably similar interpretation, “that love is that by means of which the human soul can transcend the dichotomous divisions of nature and enter into union with the First Cause.” The second important feature is that God’s yearning is superlatively powerful. Its power is identified as the very cause of His creative act and one so strong that it even draws Him to us. Jesus may have resisted the temptation of the devil, but God, as Yearning, succumbs to this desire. Yearning is so strong that it is ecstatic; it makes us, both humanity and God, stand outside of ourselves: by desire, we ascend to Him and He descends to us.

If beauty bids us and draws us to the other, the intensity of eros most vigorously propels us, ecstatically, to the object of our desire. Ecstasy, from the Greek ekstasis, is derived from the word for trance and distraction. Its spirit is captured by the idiomatic expression, existanai phrenon, to drive one out of one’s mind. Eriugena accentuates this etymological spirit when elaborating on love in the Song of Songs: “Love [dilectio] surpasses knowledge, and is greater than intelligence. He [the beloved of the Song] is loved more than understood, and love enters and approaches where knowledge stays

---

326 Copp, Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, Op. Cit., 53. Copp also acknowledges that “By using eros rather than agape, Dionysius is grounded in Greek philosophical usage, at least in the Platonic/Neo-Platonic line that most interested him,” he firmly continues, “In my opinion, he would still be inclined to do so were he writing today” (Ibid., 52).


328 William Riordan notes how ecstasy is the response to the “bidding” of beauty: “For Denys, the beauty and goodness of God eternally move Him to love of Himself and to an ecstatic creative act. It is this same divine beauty and goodness (… kallos and … agathos) that ‘calls’ (… kalei) the great multitude of various kinds of creatures into a symphonic, tidal movement back to God” (Riordan, Divine Light: The Theology of Denys the Areopagite (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 199).
outside.”

Love drives us outside and resides beyond our minds. It is derived from the prefix *ex-* , out or outside, and *-stasis* , to stand. Ecstasy, as a rapture that is a standing outside of oneself, can be designated, variously, as a fearful state, a stupor, “a wildly excited state with loss of self-control,” and/or an utter happiness and good feeling. For Pseudo-Dionysius, ecstasy is the immensely important power of being detached from one’s mortal body and reason so as to be outside of one’s self. Copp argues that, for Pseudo-Dionysius, “religious ecstasy has a place, and a high place, in the devotional return to God.” It is a power God has, naturally, by his nature, and humanity tries to achieve through erotic meditation in order to experience the ultimate oneness with Him. Its attainment is primarily through the power of erotic yearning and pleasure, although Pseudo-Dionysius does also name inebriation as another cause and symbol for this power. In the ninth of his existent letters, he writes, “one says of God … that he is ‘inebriated,’ and this is to convey that superabundance of delights unfathomable to the mind…. He is beyond being itself. Quite simply, as ‘drunk’ God stands outside of all good things, being the superfullness of all these things.” God, supremely endowed, is also supremely affected by this passion of which we feel only a slight shade and only

---


330 Quotation from Copp, *Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, Op. Cit.*, 54. Ecstasy’s contrast is *enstasis* , a standing within oneself or interiorized contemplation.


332 Pseudo-Dionysius, “Letter Nine: To Titus the hierarch,” in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works, Op. Cit.*, 1112B-C. “Inebriated” cites Song 5:1: “Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat the fruit of his apple trees. I am come into my garden, O my sister, my spouse … I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends, and drink, and be inebriated, my dearly beloved.” The dangers of superabundance may not just be God’s descent to union with humanity, but also alluded to by how Pseudo-Dionysius concludes his ninth letter: with a brief consideration of the symbols of God waking and sleeping, which “has to do with the mixing of wine and the hangover of God after his inebriation …” (*Ibid.*, 1113C).
in moments. Because His desire is more perfect, it is also more crippling for Him and empowering for us: he descends to us as we ascend to Him. As Riordan notes, “The act of loving, which follows upon the act of knowing, moves in a reverse order: the beloved draws the lover toward itself.”

Ecstasy’s effect on God and humanity is the empowering and weakening that permits divine union.

This is, quite obviously, a radically feisty and utterly treacherous argument for Pseudo-Dionysius to invoke, and he quickly cites Scripture to support his naming of God as Yearning. His claim to be following the traditional authority, however, is tentative, at best. His citations predominately reference instances of humanity’s desire for wisdom, not God, per se, and erotic longing of humans for one another. Chapter four will return to a close analysis of Pseudo-Dionysius’ name Eros and the role that eros occupies in this project and the grander history of philosophy, but it is worth briefly underscoring, again, the degree to which Pseudo-Dionysius’ employment is unique. Louth plumbs the tradition for examples that may support him; ultimately, however, he determines Pseudo-Dionysius’ use of yearning, and its implication of ecstasy as creative, to be utterly unique, that is, without Scriptural or philosophic support:

The idea of a divine ‘providential love’ (eros pronoetikos) is found in Proclus, but not the idea of God’s ‘ecstatic’ love. Nor is Proclus’s divine ‘providential love’ quite the same as Deny’s notion of God’s ‘providential love’, for Eros is one of the gods for Proclus, and not indeed one of the highest of them.

Plotinus’ Enneads offers a moving ode to beauty and Proclus’ depiction of love is powerful, but neither thinker extends love outside of itself as much as Pseudo-Dionysius.

Louth’s search for a historical foundation is not unique; he notes John Rist’s claim:

---


The first person to combine the Neoplatonic idea about God as Eros with the notion of God’s ‘ecstasy’ is Pseudo-Dionysius…. Dionysius has in fact adapted Eros to the Christian demand that God love all things, and he is the first person to do so.335

Ovid’s epic poem Ars Amatoria, crafted on the cusp of the common era, intimately delineates the plays of power and weakness in eros, but it explicitly concerns desire between men and women and not humanity and God. Plato’s Symposium partially divinizes love, but our relation that invokes eros is always with another person, not Eros himself. The Symposium does employ love as an ecstatic force wherein eros draws one beyond one’s tie to the beautiful body to admire the form of beauty itself, thus spurring the teaching of the erotic arts to others, but this exteriorizing force is not creative in the mode Pseudo-Dionysius ascribes to God. Despite the profound influence of The Divine Names, few authors or works match the purity and intensity of his invocation of eros.

The closest inheritance may be found in medieval female mystics, including Marguerite Porete, Marguerite D’Oingt, Hildegard of Bingen, and Julian of Norwich, each of whom variously eroticized the ideal relation to God but also censored themselves or met with fiery ends for these depictions.336


336 Porete was put to death at the stake in 1310 for heresy for her erotically charged The Mirror of Simple Souls and D’Oingt asked Hugues of Aamplepus to acquire approval of the Chapter General in 1294 for her writings before releasing them (even then keeping her most erotic letters private during her life).
d. Evil and Proportionate Privation

As is all too common in everyday experience, Pseudo-Dionysius turns from love to the question of evil \([\textit{kakos}]\). Specifically, if he can posit that \textit{all} must yearn for the divine, does this not include the demons? If it does, then how are they evil and not good? And are there variations, then, of yearning that determine good and evil, since it can be “responsible for that state in others which we characterize as evil” (716A)? Pseudo-Dionysius responds that “evil does not come from the Good,” for, if it did, it could not be evil, it would be good, just like how “fire cannot cool us, and likewise the Good cannot produce what is not good” (716B). But, if evil does not come from the good, from whence does it come? How can the good create all, if not, also, evil? Perhaps, all things come from the good and evil does not because it is not a thing? But this, too, cannot be the case, for Pseudo-Dionysius has already affirmed that even “nonbeing also shares in the Beautiful and the Good, because nonbeing, when applied transcendently to God in the sense of a denial of all things, is itself beautiful and good” (704B). Evil, then, is a perplexing problem: what is it, from whence does it come, and in what does it reside? Pseudo-Dionysius has denied its source to be both the Good and something other, which further proposes theoretical problems for it both being and not being something substantial.

Pseudo-Dionysius’ extended commentary on evil is, perhaps, the most complex consideration within this treatise. Like the problem of the ineffable itself, his argument first defies any linear sketch, his style of incessant run-on descriptions and conflicting questions further defines any linear address, and, finally, his method actively involves the non-contradictory embrace of these contradictions. What is important, nonetheless, to
broach is how the question of evil impinges upon that of desire: if all must yearn for the
divine, does this not include the demons?337 Yes, Pseudo-Dionysius argues, all yearn for
the Good, even the demons:

They too desire the Good, at least to the extent that they have a wish for
existence, for life, and for understanding, and their desire for what has no
being is proportionate to their lack of desire for the Good. Indeed this
latter is not so much a desire as sin against real desire (733D).

This passage is rich. As attributes, good and evil have meaning insofar as they have
some relation to desire. This does not indicate desire is sinful or evil, but, rather, that
desire is good and to “desire” evil is a sin against desire. This also means that evil is, in
some way, understood as a privation: “The cause of evil in Dionysius is privation of the
Good.”338 Privation, according to Aristotle, is “a description of the ontological moment
that lies between unformed mater and formed matter. It was, in short, non-being.”339

How, then, evil is a privation is an ambiguous matter because he has already
established that even nonbeing is good insofar as it desires the Good. If evil is privation
and privation is nonbeing, how can non-being also be good, the opposite of evil?
Initially, Pseudo-Dionysius embraces the ambiguity by positing, “… evil is not entirely
evil but has something of the Good within it which enables it to exist at all” (716C), and
“not even the devils are evil by nature” (724C), however, these claims are contradicted by
the chapter’s end. This ambiguity, however, may best be attributed to his understanding
of privation being far more intricate than the Aristotelian conception presented by Copp;
that is, it may not be simple non-being or absence, but, rather, the absence of either what

337 While demons are those beings who have evil as an attribute, rather than being evil itself, they are most
relevant to address for this project as it must later address beings who have love as an attribute, which is
also characterized as a lack.


339 Ibid.
has the potential to be or what ought to be present. This conception of privation offers us a valuable insight into one mode of reconciliation between divergent views on evil and privation. His claim that demons are evil “to the extent” that the privation is proportionate, suggests his inheritance from Plato (cf. 716C, 720B-C, 733D-736A).

However, his claims, that evil is intemperance and that one may knowingly sin (717A, 720A-D), invoke Aristotle’s consideration of Akrasia in his Nicomachian Ethics. Insofar as Aristotle’s conception of Akrasia diverges from Plato’s principle that no one knowingly desires evil, Pseudo-Dionysius’ conception of the nature of evil, informed by both positions, cannot be defined so simply. Regardless, the textual ambiguity requires one to temper a narrow interpretation of Aristotle’s privation as non-being with a definition that stresses the “between” of the above definition, that privation is a state between the formed and unformed.

If one accepts, solely, that “evil does not come from God and it is not in God either absolutely or at some stage in time” (724A) because “scripture truly states that ‘a good tree cannot bear evil fruit’” (721C), one must ask, what, then, is its definite source? Countering these affirmations with the impossibility of it having another source, the clearest answer seems to be that “Good comes from the one universal Cause, and evil originates in numerous partial deficiencies” (729C). Evil is from many things other than God because “Nothing ‘evil,’ whether as absence of Good or absence of Being, is found in God …”340 Pseudo-Dionysius’ affirmation immediately precedes a list of rhetorical questions, which, in literary analysis, would most oddly cast doubt on the claim’s legitimacy, this would a peculiar and uncharacteristic claim for him to make. Thus, setting aside the tone of his continued questioning, it is most accurate to conclude by

340 Ibid., 56.
naming the most viable answer to be the identification of evil’s source as the unmanned many. This origin helps to support the unusual, albeit necessary, argument that evil as an attribute is had in no definite, wholly ontological manner, but as an attributional, proportionate privation of the Good.

The Good “extends as far as the lowliest of things. In some beings it is present in full measure, to a lesser extent in others, and in the least measure in yet others” (720A).\(^{341}\) If good is proportional in all things, the degree to which these things lack good can be understood as their degree to which they have the capacity for evil, as a degree of lacking the good. Therefore, the privation that evil is, is not a complete privation, for all things desire the good in some degree. “In other words, all things in being will have more or less of being according as they chare more or less in the Good…. The same applies to evil” (720D-721A). Evil does not actually inhere in things; as sections 22 to 28 affirm, it is not in angels, devils, souls, animals, nature, bodies, or matter, even though they can all have attributes of evil. These attributes, though, are also capable of good; for example, mindless desire can be evil, yet it is also capable of assuring the reproduction of life and formation of nature (725B). Thus, it seems that privation in proportion to the being is the key to understanding embodied evil: “the tribe of demons is evil not because of what is in its nature but on account of what it is not” (725C). It remains an ontological attribute without being a complete ontological status.\(^{342}\)

---

\(^{341}\) The following discussion of proportion and privation (intended in the broadest sense as lack, not to suggest that the lower ought to have more, simply that it lacks that which the higher has) is important here because the possibility of proportionate privation will return in regards to eros in the fourth chapter, below, and must counter the critique from contemporary philosophy that dismisses a Platonic concept of eros as signifying a pure lack and, thus, incapable of being a motivating force.

\(^{342}\) To borrow clarifying language from the first chapter, this would be akin to a distinction Heidegger would make between Being itself and the existential constitution of Being as, for example, attunement.
But, then, suddenly, one line down he writes, simply, “No.” His declaration sets off his following elaboration of privation that “they have fallen away from the complete goodness granted them” (725C), suggesting that their goodness is not taken from them, but that their unnatural acts became obstacles to their native goodness. His following paragraph continues to flush out his conception, merging the initial explanation of privation and a turning away from the good together into a single affirmation:

Whatever is, is from the Good, is good and desires the beautiful and the Good, by desiring to exist, to live, and to think. They are called evil because of the deprivation, the abandonment, the rejection of the virtues which are appropriate to them. And they are evil to the extent that they are not, and insofar as they wish for evil they wish for what is not really there (725C).

This passage links a turning away from Good to having a privation of good as being evil. Thus, he turns away from evil as a turning away from the good and turns back to the idea of evil as a degree of privation of the good with an emphasis on the idea of proportion that accompanies the qualifications “appropriate to” and “to the extent that.”

The touch of ambiguity in the nature of evil may persist even as its linkage to desire through proportional privation is made clear. It may prove that proportional privation is truly the important theme within Pseudo-Dionysius’ work. Privation is not a matter of a complete lack such that it would necessitate that there can be no thing, let alone any thing with attributes. His explanation of proportion follows both textually and theoretically from his use of the theory of procession and return:

---

343 Pseudo-Dionysius’ conclusions on evil are the same as Saint Augustine’s: his ambiguous route to it mimics the Saint’s tortured considerations of stolen pears in Confessions, book II and On Free Choice of the Will; both consider evil as a privation; both consider it to be a turning away from the Good. They differ only by Pseudo-Dionysius’ emphasis on the degrees of privation and his more apparent delineation of these definitions of evil as separate arguments that may contradict rather than different elements of a single, more coherent theory of evil.
Perfect goodness reaches out to all things and not simply to immediate good neighbors. It extends as far as the lowliest of things. In some beings it is present in full measure, to a lesser extent in others, and in the least measure in yet others. It is there in proportion to the capacity to receive it (717D-720A).

The metaphysical system is also epistemological, as addressed in the review of his first chapter, because divine truth is “revealed to each mind in proportion to its capacities …” (588A). This proportional, creative distribution further reveals itself to tie him to the Neoplatonic tradition as it is notably akin to Plato’s explanation of our degree of knowledge of the forms. Socrates explains that our souls have contact with the forms prior to embodiment and after our bodily deaths. However, like Pseudo-Dionysius’ demons, not all souls have full access to the forms because one’s acquaintance with them depends upon the life that one has lived, that is, if one has trained the mind properly to see or grasp the forms.344

The proportional privation of evil that links the metaphysics of procession and reversion to a Platonic epistemology determined by how one lives one’s life also resonates with the anonymous author’s Christian inheritance and teachings. The proportioning of spiritual knowledge dependent upon capacity is clearly discernable in Augustine’s affirmation, in On Free Choice of the Will, that the Good may be an universal, knowable truth even while we have no guarantee of its perfect knowledge. For God is, as an editorial title summarizes, “that which is more excellent than reason.”345

The Good as God is knowable insofar as we know God’s goodness through his creation

---

344 For example, “… the one that has seen the most things shall implant in that which will engender a man who will become a philosopher or lover of the beautiful or someone musical and erotic; the second in that of a lawful king …” all the way to the lowliest rungs “the eighth, a sophistic or demagogic; for the ninth, a tyrannical” (Plato, Phaedrus, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995), 248d-e).

and the Scriptures, Augustine argues, but He is ultimately unknowable in that He
transcends our every possible conception. In the face of this paradox, we must train our
sights to goodness, turn away from evil, and, by God’s grace, we will be granted the
greatest degree of knowledge our capacity permits. Proportional privation permits us to
see the many diverse inheritances coming together in Pseudo-Dionysius’ work and also
points to how he is engaged in a project that may prove ultimate valuable for Lyotard’s
central problematic.

Because we are not all created equal, and “the things of God are revealed to each
mind in proportion to its capacities,” we much each strive to our own capacity to come to
know, which is to come to love and desire return to the One (588A). “Indeed the
inscrutable One is out of the reach of every rational process.… And yet, on the other
hand, the Good is not absolutely incommunicable to everything” (588B-C). Thus, if we
are the rational creatures, yet God exceeds every rational process, we must seek access to
what he reveals to us through the use of every faculty and power granted us. We must
learn God through more than what we use to learn our multiplication tables. I propose
that Pseudo-Dionysius’ method is born out of his careful attention to the call to know
God and awareness of the inability of a direct answer. His method acknowledges reason
while undermining it; his treatise is a delineation of names in awareness that no
encyclopedia can capture God. His treatise is as duplicitous as his stutter of names for it
is his practice and lesson in prayer.

e. Mystical Language and Spiritual Exercise

“Oh taste and see that the Lord is Good”
A common trait shared through the many historical permutations of mysticism is the adoption of an emotionally and sensuously vivid prose. Its language operates through allusion and intimation. Dramatically embellished description, infused with mood, seems to more effectively capture and reveal the impossible, divine presence than does a language like that in science that is claimed to connect words, meanings, and things without fluctuation or interpretation. Description can allude to truth even when identification fails. This is elaborated in De Saussure’s seminal *Course in General Linguistics* as the radical proposition of the “arbitrariness” of the sign. He argued that there is a basic arbitrariness or difference between the word and the thing, the signifier and the signified. This undermines and dismisses a theory of language that says that there is a one to one correspondence, an unbreakable bond, between, for example, “desk” and a desk. De Saussure liberates language from being chained to its static instantiation in a particular reality and instead reveals that there is no ultimate rule or set of structures for a relationship between a word and that which it represents.

Ludwig Wittgenstein argues a similar proposition in the beginning of his *Philosophical Investigations* and destroys the idea of a one to one correspondence between the utterance and thing and thereby liberates language from both the binds

---

346 Gershom Scholem, concerning this passage, notes: “It is this tasting and seeing, however spiritualized it may become, that the genuine mystic desires. His attitude is determined by the fundamental experience of the inner self which enters into immediate contact with God or the metaphysical Reality. What forms the essence of this experience, and how it is to be adequately described—that is the great riddle which the mystics themselves, no less than the historians, have tried to solve” (Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schoken Books, 1974), 4.

imposed by the conflicting schools of psychologism and behavioralism. Lyotard is making a very similar argument in *The Differend* by arguing that there is always another phrase and the flexibility of linkages that develop between different phrase events. It is precisely because of the ultimate arbitrariness of the sign and infinite possibility for linkages that perplexes the philosopher when an event is confronted, a differend, which is so superabundantly full of meaning that no one phrase or collection of phrases can begin to express it. When the object under consideration is God, He who, by definition, exceeds all that is, there is no single name that can properly capture His being. Language that describes all one can say of Him and alludes beyond itself to all that one cannot say better expresses His reality.

As McGinn notes, in his massive tome on mysticism, the encounter with God “defies conceptualization and verbalization, in part or in whole.” Gershom Scholem, in his seminal study of Jewish mysticism, notes that mystical speculation, any reflection on and description of the mystical experience, “is of a highly contradictory and even paradoxical nature.” But, any event that defies its certain capture calls to the curious animal of humanity to get at it in any way possible. What perplexes us presents itself to us as a question, and every question seeks its answer. Jean-Louis Chrétien notes, “The appeal must answer for the very possibility of being heard, of being a call for someone and to someone, lest it fail to be a call at all.” The elusive event calls to the faithful

---


and philosopher to employ indirection and suggestion to proffer an answer that is prohibited from reason’s realm of possibility.

McGinn argues that this philosophic poeticism uses language “not so much informationally as transformationally, that is, not to convey a content but to assist the hearer or reader to hope for or to achieve the same consciousness.” Indirect and poetic language, the most effective tool for capturing what evades capture, is effective precisely by cultivating in one the correct disposition for seeing the unseen. The cultivation is for both the addressor and addressee wherein the latter can be both the object of address, God, as a form of prayer to Him, or to the fellow faithful who hear the confession. The indirection of the language does not teach what is ineffable, but how to hear what does not speak. This is not an unacknowledged knowledge, according to Gersh, in the specifically Christian Neoplatonism that grounded Pseudo-Dionysius, “in every external object there is an inexpressible element not assimilable in the cognitive process.”

Teaching and receiving this inexpressible knowledge through something other than the rational, cognitive processes is the endeavor of mystical language and spiritual exercise. The emphasis on sensible in the wake of the intelligible’s unreliability, on seeing the unseen, speaking the unspeakable, and hearing the unhearable, indicates the

---

352 McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, Op. Cit., xvii. Curiously, mysticism’s pedagogy is remarkably akin to asceticism’s program of the exercise of absence and prohibition despite the former’s embrace, rather than rejection, of the sensuous and desire.

353 Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, Op. Cit., 276. Gersh turns to this doctrine of Neoplatonism because, he explains, “the writer [Pseudo-Dionysius] does not give any further details of the type of cognitive activity visualized here [how the human soul approaches objects beyond perception];” and affirms that Neoplatonism offers the best aid to any further explanation and elaboration (*Ibid.*).

354 Gallus’ interpretation of the connection between love and knowledge in Pseudo-Dionysius likewise supports this argument about a knowing that is beyond reason alone; the essence of his affirmation is paraphrased by Boyd Taylor Coolman as: “in the soul’s ascent, knowledge ultimately fails, while love presses on to union with God” (Boyd Taylor Coolman, “The Medieval Affective Dionysian Tradition,” in *Re-Thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, Op. Cit., 85-102, 91).
receptivity being trained by mystical poeticism is not reason, but its opposite, the passions.\footnote{Cf. the sixth section of concluding remarks in chapter one and the second section of chapter four for further argumentation on the passions as an epistemological base.}

Reason’s ideas are reiterable; it takes presentations and submits them to synthesis that comprehends and contextualizes them and yields that which can be represented. The passions, passio, are “affections of the mind,” born from pathos, a feeling the mind suffers. They can include desire and fear, delight and distress. While there is a cognitive dimension to the passions, their immediate data is as presentations that resist their encapsulation and reiteration but exude meaning insofar as they move us. The passions are what the stoics, ascetics, and scientists seek to avoid. The indirection of mystical language cannot entirely capture the object of investigation, but can convey His meaning by their expression of struggle and attempt. For example, the lover of another, human or God, who prostrates himself as he speaks conveys more than he who shows nothing more than the linguistic utterance. The act of prostration is a phrase spoken alongside his actual verbal content. Mystical language’s poeticism or indirection can accomplish what the body does as it throws itself to the ground. These other phrases demonstrated in mystical language, however, do not simply convey more information, but convey something like mood. When the event of the differend surpasses our rational address, when it confounds our language and confronts us by the passions, when we desire to respond to its call and find ourselves silenced before it because it surpasses what our mind conjures for us to speak, we must come to listen to the passions and let them teach us how to reply.
Augustine’s *Confessions* reveals the difficulty of this lesson. His autobiography chronicles his coming to know God and conversion to Christianity. His path is guided by his desire to know God, “Let me know you, my known, *let me know Thee even as I am known,*” and his acknowledgement of how he is ignorant as to how to know Him: “how shall I find you if I do not remember you,” and “how can one pray to you unless one knows you,” and “But what do I love when I love you?”

Much of his book chronicles his intellectual pursuit of this knowledge, but when he asks the question about what does he love, his ruminations veer from the intelligible path. He first answers the question by admitting his love is “not [for] the beauty of the body nor the glory of time, not the brightness of light shining so friendly to the eye,” because God is not his creations, but the perfection of them all, and so it is God who is like, but not, the beauty of this body and brilliance of this light. He then asks again, “And what is this God?” He answers:

I asked the earth and it answered “I am not he,” and all things on earth confessed the same. I asked the sea and the deeps and the creeping things with living souls, and they replied: “We are not your God. Look above us.” I asked the blowing breezes, and the universal air with all its inhabitants answered: “Anaximenes was wrong. I am not God.” I asked the heaven, the sun, the moon, the stars, and “No,” they said, “we are not the God for whom you are looking.” And I said to all those things which stand about the gates of my senses: “Tell me something about Him.” And they cried out in a loud voice: “He made us.” My question was in my contemplation of them, and their answer was in their beauty.

---


357 The process of his intellectual conversion is far more pronounced; for example, he begged God to forgive children of their sin from ignorance, spent anguished pages seeking the reason why he stole pears, turns away from Christianity for its use of parable and non-literal account, and turns to and then away from the Manicheans for their ability to give rational answers to his questions.

358 Ibid.

359 Ibid., X, 6. The last sentence reads: “interrogatio mea intentio mea et responsio eorum species eorum.” R.A. Markus’ translation: “My question was the attention I gave to them, and their response was their *species,*” and justifies his dropping of the last word, beauty, and maintenance of the Latin *species* as more truthfully revelatory of the intention of the original (*Signs and Meanings: Word and Text in Ancient*
All the things that Augustine asks respond, “He made us,” answering his methodic seeking with a display of their beauty as answer. So, Augustine looks to his own self, and asks, what am I? A man, a thing that is body and a soul; and he asks himself, which of these should I use to find God? With this question Augustine reveals that he did not listen properly to all of creation. He asked them in contemplation, and mistook them all. He turned to reason, which cannot supply him with an answer, instead of listening through the passions to how they answered in beauty. He continues seeking an impossible answer through contemplation, through reason, whereas, had he listened to the beauty of creation, he could have learned how he is to respond and know God. The mythic dialogue with creation, the demonstration of truth through beauty, like God speaking through Monica and the child’s “tolle lege” in the garden to inspire his conversion, is not the testimony this confessor knows how to hear or to properly respond.

The Neoplatonist and monotheist just prior to Pseudo-Dionysius, Philo, likewise substituted the faithful one for the Dyad in the cycle of emanation who desires both what comes from God and to return to Him. The faithful’s desire leads him, Philo proposes, to philosophical exercise as the practice of a lesson on how to achieve that “certain state of soul denominated ‘enthusiasm,’ a ‘reposeful divine rapture,’” the overwhelming, yet peaceful, excess of sense that permits a senselessness, “in which the soul, liberated from sense and absorbed in itself, is fructified by God.”360 This is a state wherein one can listen to the affectations of the mind from Augustine’s account of the beauty of the birds and intoxication of the breeze and let this desire arouse a knowledge forbidden to reason.

---

This knowledge may be expressed though something much like Pseudo-Dionysius’ radical conjunction of affirmative and negative theologies that works through each name for God. His method, too, may best be understood as a philosophical exercise motivated by his desire to give praise to God and seek divine union. An actual systematization of the divine names is not Pseudo-Dionysius’ goal, as he admits that God is He who surpasses reason’s encapsulation. Instead, his activity of delineating the names is best considered to be an act of praise and the active cultivation of the ecstatic rapture that may permit him reunion with the One.361

Pseudo-Dionysius’ spiritual exercise enacts a certain absurdity, expressing the inexpressible, is motivated by and receives its content from the sensuous rather than reason, and is inextricable from language. Pseudo-Dionysius’ spiritual exercises are remarkably akin to Lyotard’s insistence upon the necessity of seeking the impossible idiom by which the silenced witness could testify to the logically impossible. No expression can capture the inexpressible, but to fail to express it is nevertheless productive and, perhaps, the only manner by which to honor and memorialize. The synchronicity between the unknown, presumably Syrian faithful and difficult to characterize, French postmodernist suggests that their pedagogy of productive failure may be at the heart of the philosophical life. Pierre Hadot makes a compelling case for the universality of spiritual exercise as the attempt to achieve active repose and the intention embedded in philosophical method from the ancients to contemporary

361 Similarly, Scholem cites a Hasidic mystic, Levi Isaac, who wrote: “He who is granted this supreme experience loses the reality of his intellect, but when he returns from such contemplation to the intellect, he finds it full of divine and inflowing splendor” (Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Op. Cit., 5).
thought.\textsuperscript{362} If his argument is given credence, then it is not illegitimate to fuse together, once more, philosophy’s branches of epistemology and ethics, to view with equal importance philosophy’s content and its conveyance, and to let the anonymous mystic share with the rigorous postmodernist a final, two-part potential solution for the silenced witness.

Chapter Four

Silence and *Eros*

4.1. Introduction to a Last/Further Solution

The last two chapters contextualized Jean-François Lyotard and Pseudo-Dionysius into the traditions from which they came and brought to light the raw material that bridges their heterogeneous times, influences, and intentions. The theories that they inherited and the wakes that they left behind rival one another in size but differ in character. Nonetheless, both thinkers struggle with the problem of how to let the witness to the ineffable give meaningful testimony. Pseudo-Dionysius amalgamates Neoplatonism and monotheism with an insistent mysticism to produce a radical method of the affirmation and denial of the names of God. His intention is to let him give testimony to He who evades our capacity to know Him as a mode of praise and means of return to the One. Pseudo-Dionysius does not question the success of his method even as he leaves us no evidence that it yielded him divine union. Lyotard hybridizes the phenomenological epoché with avant-garde aesthetics and post-structuralist linguistics. With this pluralistic method, he enacts a careful rereading of texts to unravel their paradoxes anew and reveal the unfixed diversity of their meanings and inherent plethora of linkages they open up to other ideas. He rereads texts in the spirit of therapy that does not only rework the past but founds and clears a variety of innovative paths forward,
which prove to be therapeutic, even if they ultimately end in impassable thickets. Both thinkers are driven to engage radical methods to accomplish the impossible.

Lyotard’s goal is to give voice to the logically impossible testimony. His most poignant provocation follows from examining the rigidity of logic in Faurisson’s claim that there were no gas chambers at Auschwitz. This odious allegation gagged the survivor and prohibited her testimony of the death camp to be deemed true, since she was alive. Exploring the circularity and violence of this revisionist logic, Lyotard began to discern the bounds of meaningful and meaningless phrases and how the ineffable operates within an argumentative frame of a rational tribunal. One way of interpreting *The Differend* is as his search for the unknown idiom that could be understood by the tribunal as it unwinds the bind of logic and expresses the inexpressible. This interpretation understands Lyotard’s writing as a mimesis of the witness’ struggle to testify. Both fall silent as they come to understand the implications of the logical bind and then fall quickly from silence to a fury of incessant phrases. Phrase after phrase is tried out as phrase regimes are diagnosed and then experimented with and undermined in the pursuit of a means of rationally expressing what falls outside the bounds of reason.

Amongst many other testimonies taken up and tried out, Lyotard’s sharpest focal points include the works of Gertrude Stein, Wittgenstein, Adorno, and the oral history style of the native Cashinahua tribe with an eye to appraise the flexibility of their linkages and whether they permit an avenue to make the meaningless more meaningful. Such a route could lead the witness’ testimony into the tribunal’s realm of comprehension. Yet, despite Lyotard’s persistence in unfolding and elaborating many diverse options, each one meets its own differend; ultimately, all the alternatives fail the
survivor. This mass of failure, however, grates against Lyotard’s critique of Adorno, which, in large part, was that his work made a bind as strangling as the revisionist’s when he refused his project to have any positivity. Can Lyotard’s own continual failure, then, render a failure that, itself, may be productive? If so, then, can this productivity be replicated by the witness even as it lacks a theoretical core of a fixed method and prescribed content? In other words, Lyotard gives us neither a theory nor a defined method of reduction and description, but, nevertheless, does he give us a model to imitate wherein he and the witness become his prescription of philosophical exercise?363

A common anecdote tells how the Caribbean natives could not see Columbus’ clipper ships approaching their shores because such ships so exceeded what they were capable of conceiving by their past experiences and collective wisdom. A shaman, however, was said to have noticed the wake of the ships in the ocean. Studying the wake, day after day, inventing and elaborating various causal hypotheses for the rippling water, one day, he was able to see the ships. Because the tribe unquestionably trusted his ability to see what they could not, when he shared with them his story of the clipper ships, they, too, were able to see them. The shaman’s story of the inconceivable was heard by an audience that had been conditioned to his authority and trained to attentive repose; under these conditions, his account rendered in them a mystical experience.

Pseudo-Dionysius’ discernment, speaking, and analyzing of the names of God give him access to an impossible knowledge, the first step towards the mystical experience of divine union. Pseudo-Dionysius is embedded in a tradition of spiritual exercise. His treatise invokes pedagogy, however implicitly, as often as it selects a name

363 Lyotard differentiates between the indifferent example and the model that becomes involved in what it models (Lyotard, The Differend: Phrases in Dispute, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), §152). All further citations to this work will be parenthetical.
from the Scriptures. He names himself as a convert of and student to Paul and Hierotheus. Technically, he is not the student of either, as he is neither Dionysius from the Acts nor did Hierotheus likely ever exist. But, Paul was a Christian converting the Greeks and Hierotheus was to be a Greek who was Christian; thus, Pseudo-Dionysius is a student to both as he is both Neoplatonist and monotheist. He is a student, collecting the names of God from the authors of the Scriptures, even as he is a teacher, delineating these names and expanding them in unprecedented ways. He also names himself an elder and writes his treatises as edifications to his younger colleagues. While all these claims are ambiguous, being and not being the case at once, nevertheless, they do reveal the importance of pedagogy in his theology. His method is as crucial to achieving divine union as is the actual content of divine names, likewise, his work’s role as instruction to the faithful is as crucial as its role as innovative philosophy to the canon.

This raises the question that, if the shaman’s story can bring the tribe to see the inconceivable and Pseudo-Dionysius’ affirmation and negation of names can inculcate divine union, then can mimicry of Lyotard’s pursuit of the unknown idiom permit the witness, and us readers, to give meaningful testimony to that which defies demonstration? This final chapter takes up this endeavor. It imitates Lyotard’s method of taking up an example of phrasing that challenges the limits of comprehension and working through it to explore its potential to found new theoretical linkages that may, possibly, meaningfully, bridge the differend. It conducts this mimesis as a spiritual exercise, as an enactment of his pedagogy; thus, it seems appropriate to make him, and us, students of Pseudo-Dionysius. This chapter will seek to enact a Lyotardian reading, using his own
texts as much as possible, of Pseudo-Dionysius’ vital, however dichotomous, premises that let him speak of God: silence and \textit{eros}.

And if, like Lyotard’s other lines of enquiry, these premises fail to overcome the differend, fail to let the tribunal comprehend the witness’ impossible witnessing, the exercise may still be argued to be productive. In the result of its failure, Lyotard’s endeavor will validate the very productivity of failure just as how failure for the shaman and Pseudo-Dionysius could still be useful. Even if the shaman had not brought sight to the whole tribe and even if \textit{The Divine Names} did not initiate infallible divine union, one’s knowledge of impending ships is still pragmatically valuable and the exercise of reflecting on and speaking the divine names is still a sincere act of faith. This suggests, then, that even if neither Lyotard nor we can find the impossible idiom that could testify to the impossible, the endeavor is philosophically valuable for the tradition and humanisitically valuable by means of tribute and memorial to the primary and secondary violences of the holocaust.

The possible conclusions to this chapter do stand in a relation of tension. If Pseudo-Dionysius’ silence and \textit{eros} are ultimately productive for Lyotard’s witness, it cannot form another failed option. Failure is ultimately productive for both thinkers as a spiritual exercise. Thus, the success of one method is the end of the productivity of failure. This tension, however, quickly dissolves if one steps back from the problem to look at the entire picture. Productivity for the witness, of the horror or the divine, essentially, is the individual coming to the production of an expression reflective of one’s comprehension. It is the expression of what one knows. Thus, the actualization of knowledge does not destroy the potentiality of its utility; as Aristotle makes plain in his
elaboration of potentiality, he who speaks Italian does not cease to know Italian when he is not speaking it. A witness coming to express the inexpressible does not nullify the likelihood she or he will encounter new differends or continue to reflect on the original differend. Spiritual exercise does not end with a single, successful expression just as one’s ability to speak a language does not cease when one is not speaking. Therefore, the project, however ironically, is ensured success. Either the other language will be mastered and spoken and the last option will be successful, or the mastery will fail, and it will have become simply a further option explored and successful as a spiritual exercise rather than end.

The following endeavor will begin with a brief account of how silence and *eros* co-implicate each other as options for the meaningful expression of the inexpressible. The next section must address and overturn Lyotard’s dismissal of silence, delineated in the first chapter, as a viable option for the logically bound witness. The final section will be a Lyotardian rereading of Pseudo-Dionysius’ *eros* introduced by and supplemented with a distinction of *agape* and *eros* from *The Differend* and Lyotard’s posthumous writings on Augustine’s *Confessions*. 
4.2. The Symbiosis of Silence and Eros

“The lover’s discourse is today of an extreme solitude”
—Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse.*

The roles of silence and *eros* in Pseudo-Dionysius’ *The Divine Names* has been broached in the last chapter and will be elaborated fully below. In brief, silence occupies an ambiguous role and state: it is the philosophically proper and faithfully reverent response to God’s incomprehensibility and is indicative of the state of active repose achieved after the exercise of speaking God’s names. It is how we should approach God and how the approach to God leaves us; but, in between the approach and conclusion, it demands its necessary violation. *Eros* is equally or more ambiguous, being a force responsible for creation and reversion, a state shared by both humanity and the divine, and an uniquely important name of God. Silence and *eros* take on renewed importance, here, as being particularly viable options for giving voice to the expression of meaning outside of the grasp of reason. Silence evokes the possibility of expressing the power and sensation of *eros* as meaningful, without reducing it to a logical representation of the experience of an erotic sensation. *Eros* illuminates how a motivation or force can be universally, unquestionably comprehended and capable of an exteriorization beyond subjectivity, or what an individual could comprehend through self-reference. The question, then, becomes the possibility of silence to be expressive of a truth beyond what logic can understand, and whether this truth is *eros*?

For silence to say something, as opposed to being the absence of something said, silence, then, must be heard by a faculty other than reason. Silence must speak to the

---

passions. Passion, as explored in the first and third chapters, above, is an affectation of the mind, a feeling that the mind suffers.\textsuperscript{365} The mind does not rationally conquer passionate ideas, but suffers them: it undergoes and endures them. The mind is intuitively and emotively overwhelmed and enthralled by ideas issuing from the passions. Passionate ideas are powerful. Ethos, Logos, and Pathos are demarcated as the three modes of persuasion in Aristotle’s Rhetoric. Ethos is the act of establishing of one’s knowledge, expertise, or competence in the mind of the audience. Logos is an appeal to the audience through reason or logic. Pathos is an appeal to the audience’s emotions.\textsuperscript{366}

Philosophy fears, reverently and justifiably, the passions. The emotive is a seductive temptress, deceitful, who lures the mind away from cold, objective truth. She is, indeed, a devious opponent. Even the staid Kant, while fearful of the philosopher’s boat being overturned by the waves of passions, serenades this siren when uplifting the power of the sublime as the culminating moment of the critical project.

The sublime is that which overwhelms the rational capacities of the mind, temporarily freezing the mortal in awe and fear, before his apparatus reignites and grants a pleasurable overcoming of sensation by rational comprehension. The dynamic sublime is illustrated as the violent storm at sea, so fierce, man stands paralyzed at its display of incomprehensible force, before affirming himself as safe. Awareness of his safety results from his capacity to rationally distance himself from the danger and grants him ecstatic power over its ferocity. The mathematical sublime is illustrated as a ravine cut across the earth, so deep, man stands aside it, overwhelmed by vertigo. In the experience’s

\textsuperscript{365} Cf. the concluding remarks of chapter one, section six and chapter three, section one for further argumentation concerning the differentiation of passions from reason.

immediacy, he is incapable of assigning a concretion to the infinite or counting the miles or minutes of its depth. But, his reason reawakens; he steps back and measures the scene in front of him as the power of knowledge pleasurably overcomes the split of the earth. Kant’s sublime affirms that reason, philosophically, is the conqueror of passionate thinking, although, passion puts up a venerable fight. Yet, as the conquer writes history, he demarcates an unwritten tale. Lyotard’s revelation of bounty of possibilities beyond the recurrent grand narratives, of which reason’s conquer is one, demonstrates that the alternate account always exists, even if it does so without attributes, eulogies, or even sound. It is this other tale, the unexpressed testimony, that speaks of the power of the erotic; it is the sublime before her overcoming we must strive to hear.

Kant explored the sublime most frequently with imagery from nature. Lyotard invokes the sublime most frequently in regards to avant-garde art. Julia Kristeva turns to literature though which to conduct her insightful analysis of this other narrative that is uncovered if we suspend the sublime in its moment prior to reason’s resumption. Her analysis of this begins in the chapter entitled “Is Sensation a Form of Language,” from

---


369 Further, naming Kant’s Third Critique (along with Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations) as “pretext” to The Differend (p. xiii).
Kristeva argues that Proust discovered a language capable of expressing sensation, the “... opaque, nonverbal, sensory experience of deep sleep in the same way he discovered a language capable of expressing the sensations of perverse pleasure [in its immediacy] ...” And, further, that Proust believed that the very aim and purpose of creative writing was to capture the “... inexpressible sensory experience of a painful jouissance....” If her, and his, hypotheses bear out, then Proust will be a model of a witness giving testimony to that which defies logic’s grasp and the tribunal’s standards of evidence. While Kristeva’s analysis is far more concise than Proust, here, it still exceeds any productive summary; instead, like in Lyotard’s Notices, I will excise only one of her examples from his works to draw out her argument. Kristeva traces a scene from Proust’s *Sodom and Gomorrah* back to its first inscription in a letter he wrote to his housekeeper Céleste:

> My dear Céleste, what I have witnessed this evening is unimaginable. Le Cuziat told me there was a man who goes there to be whipped, and I saw the whole thing from another room, through a little window in the wall.... I wanted to see it for myself. Well, I saw it. It is a big industrialist.... Imagine—there he is in a room, fastened to a wall with chains and padlocks, while some wretch, picked up heaven knows where, who gets paid for it, whips him till the blood spurts out all over everything. And it is only then that the unfortunate creature experiences the heights of pleasure.  

Proust makes the unimaginable palpable for Céleste’s imagination: it “is unimaginable,” he writes, “Imagine”! He strives to draw her into the pleasure that exceeds the event of

---


224
one man’s masochism: a secret knowledge was shared with Proust, he desired to see it, he bore witness to it, clandestinely, through a crack, he shares the knowledge and vision with Céleste in speech, and then in writing, finally, he weaves it into his novel for his characters to reenact, and thus multiply, all the levels of pleasure.  

According to Kristeva’s hypothesis, the experience of pleasure coincides with its expression and this is uniquely captured in Proust’s writing. How is this? What is it about his writing, uniquely, that captures the immediacy of sensation that all other writing falsifies through its re-presentation? The aspect deemed unique in Proust’s writing is that it reveals the sensation of the paradox of pain and pleasure. Only in writing, is his pleasure consummated; yet, it is consummated in the paradox of guilt and delight, which serves to rupture the finality that consummation implies. Proust reveals an apologetic delight and delighted need to share the pleasure that he took in the act of experiencing another’s masochism, that is, to extend the experience of pleasure out in time and beyond itself through its expression. Kristeva writes that Proust’s account of his experience leading up to and following his spying, like his experience, itself, “… goes from one sensation (sadomasochistic, voyeuristic) to another until it reaches ‘the pleasure of the text,’ which is conveyed through a language nourished by all the sensations,

---

374 The jouissance is not proprietarily, or even properly, the industrialist’s; Proust’s jouissance forsweares its end/consummation by eroticizing every step up to and after the voyeurism. Even guilt and mortification become pleasurable: Céleste’s mortification spawns his pain, guilt, and need to explain; his explanation begets his pleasure in vivifying what he witnessed and being able to now write. She reports his confession, “I can only write things as they are, and to do that I have to see them,” and that they “talked about the horrible flagellation scene for hours that night. I still horror-struck and he going over it as if not to forget anything, and no doubt thinking aloud, as usual, of what he was going to write” (Kristeva, Time and Sense, Op. Cit., 239 and 241; she quotes Albaret, Monsieur Proust, Op. Cit., 196 and 198, respectively).

thereby becoming music, style, and flesh.”376 And, thereby, sensation climaxes into its sensuous expression having bypassed its codification in understanding and its re-presentation through the logic that shapes language.

But, has Proust’s sensation spoken? His language is spectacular and agile: it mimics the dual movement of the sublime through an expression of being overwhelmed before pleasurably coming to understand. However, his words describe experiences of painful jouissance: for the man from the whip and for himself from the act of spying, confessing, writing. His language does not express sensation in the sense of being its immediacy; it describes various persons’ experiences of it. His writing makes sensation into spectacle. Sensation becomes a representation of sensation. There is no way to argue that the description of the scene and sensation of the industrialist, “there he is in a room, fastened to a wall with chains and padlocks, while some wretch … whips him till the blood spurts out all over everything. And it is only then that the unfortunate creature experiences the heights of pleasure,” is the sensation rather than its description.377 If we read Proust from the witness stand, how do we prove we are reading sensation?

If, by reading it, we each feel it, we could argue that his writing is generative of sensation. His writing could be a perverse instance, then, of the spiritual exercise of the cultivation of capacity, for example, of dwelling on God’s love so as to feel His love so as to love to become worthy of His love.378 We could argue that if Proust’s description can ignite our desire, then it may be a productive model for the witness to imitate through

---


378 Divine union, of course, is only given to us by God’s grace, but our inner capacity to desire it and be receptive to it can be cultivated through our engagement in spiritual exercise.
testimony that would prime the tribunal’s understanding and cultivate their capacity to hear it. Yet, as a model, Proust may only be the witness’ preparatory teacher. As defined by Plato, desire is a lack whereas understanding must have its object. The description of the sadomasochistic pleasure only needs to generate a disruptive and compelling awareness of absence. The witness’ testimony, to be valid, needs to generate an awareness of something. This reinitiates the impossibility of the task; the something that the witness must make the others aware of having is something that cannot be demonstrated.

Proust’s erotic experience is profoundly, perversely sexual. Eros, however, should not properly be limited to a definition of sexual love, alone. How it is to be defined is a remarkably thorny matter even as (and perhaps because) it is one of great importance for this project. Eros is complicated linguistically, etymologically, and by the fact of its long history of interpretation. Further, it is, indubitably, a controversial topic in historical and contemporary considerations in both theology and Continental philosophy (not to mention many other fields of study which have varying impact on these two of our concern). While the particular religious challenges that eros faces when employed by Pseudo-Dionysius will be explored in the fourth section of this chapter, here, it will serve the project well to simply introduce its definition and most productive attributes for this

---

379 “All who feel desire, feel it for what is not provided or present; for something they have not or are not or lack and that sort of thing is the object of desire and love” (Plato, Symposium, in Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 9, trans. Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), 200d-e) and Plato Meno, wherein knowledge, like the statues of Daedalus, must be chained down (Meno, trans. W.K.C. Guthrie, in Plato: The Collected Dialogues of Plato, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 353-384, 97e ff.). The communion, however, between eros and knowledge is hardly impossible; the continuing argument will reveal the natural necessity of their link in this project and that has been broached and validated in the canon. Contemporary philosophers, notably Immanuel Levinas, have importantly hesitated at this conjunction and revealed the problems of too rigidly defining eros as lack rather than plenitude. The following analysis will reveal the project’s definition of eros, as well as its use in Pseudo-Dionysius and Lyotard, to evade the problem by synthesizing lack and plenitude.
undertaking. Its definition, however, does do well to initially reveal its contentious importance within theological debate.

This section cannot do justice to the long history of philosophy’s engagement of *eros* in debates as varied as those concerning human nature, political organization, ethics, and epistemology (as it is clear that “Love is a philosophically unruly being, and the despair of moral epistemologists”\(^{380}\)), but will attempt to contextualize a few of its key aspects that elucidate and justify its frequent consideration. Within contemporary Continental philosophy, the many, divergent strains of the consideration of *eros* are equally difficult to disentangle. Contemporary philosophy’s engagement with Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis resulted in its ready adoption of *eros* as a significant and foundational human drive. French feminism took up a definition of *eros* that echoed both ancient and psychoanalytic readings to explicate gender difference. Post-structuralists identified and reinterpreted the ancient conception of *eros* as a lynchpin to uncovering the logocentricism of Western philosophy. And the diverse philosophers engaging contemporary readings of Judaism and Christianity, including those working in a vein of a religious post-existentialist or theologically-inclined phenomenology, proposed an ethical-religious dimension of *eros* exemplified in hermeneutical readings of sacred texts, underscoring religious and secular ritual, and explaining both our knowing of and being in the world. The rich, and possibly sordid, history of *eros* justifies the necessity of an excursus into the understanding and significance of *eros* for the current endeavor’s conjunction of it with silence as the most productive means of expressing the inexpressible. This necessary digression will walk through a brief review of *eros*’

---

difficult linguistic heritage to forge a working definition that then will be conceptually
analyzed for what account it may offer on the intentional relation it establishes and the
nature of the knowledge that it yields.

There are many ways to define *eros*. The most common translation into English
is as “love,” but always carries an implicit asterisk signaling the necessity of
understanding that there are many variations of love. The main variants of love, in
ancient Greek, include: *eros*, *agape*, *philia*, and *storge*. Commonly, these differentiate
sexual love, chaste love, friendship, and familial affection. Unfortunately, these
differentiations are timorous for both the disparity of the precedents in translation and for
the disparity in their long history of conceptual considerations. Most sources do not keep
the distinctions rigid and partially or fully synthesize them under a single term for “love.”
For example, Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott’s standard *A Greek-English
Lexicon* acknowledges the sexual dimension of *eros* without limiting it therein when it
translates *eros* as desire and love. It continues, at length, to include variations of its
definition, such as: “love, mostly of the sexual passion … love for one, love of a thing,
desire for it,” “object of love or desire,” “passionate joy,” “the god of love,” “at Nicaea, a
funeral wreath,” and “the name of the klêros Aphroditês.” With an allusion, but

---

381 The *Oxford English Dictionary* requires nearly five massive columns of minuscule text to define “love;”
in addition to being both noun and verb, a base for nearly every other grammatical construction, and
employed in innumerable colloquial expressions, the preeminent guide distinguishes between (non-
exhaustively) romantic love, sexual love, chaste love, familial love, and national love with reference to the
*Bible*, presidents, classical and contemporary literary authors, scientists, and mythology.

382 Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, revised and augmented throughout
Despite the length, it is valuable to note the literary precedents that the editors cite to see how little the act
of sex factors into the definition. For the primary definition, “love, desire,” they reference Homer’s
*Odyssey* 18.212 and *Iliad* 1.469; Hesiod’s *Theogony* 1064 and 910; Sophocles’ *Electra* 193; Euripides’
*Medea* 148, *Hippolytus* 313, and *Electra* 262; and Lucretius’ *Asin.* 33. The precedent singled out by the
editors for the definition that includes reference to “the sexual passion,” is only Aeschylus’ *Libation
Bearers* [*Thêlukratês*], 600. Further references supporting the definition of *eros* as love and desire include:
without a specific reference to sexual activity, William J. Slater’s *Lexicon to Pindar* defines *eros* primarily as passion and love and, secondarily, as desire and longing.\(^{383}\) *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, likewise, suggests sexuality without therein limiting the term when it defines “erotic” as an adjective meaning sexual desire that is derived from *eros*, defined only as “love,” and related to *erâsthai*, defined as “to love, desire.”\(^{384}\) In contrast, Douglas Harper’s electronic dictionary of etymology, however, clearly defines *eros* as “sexual love,” *agapao* as “have regard for,” *phileo* as “have affection for,” and *stergo* as “used explicitly of the love of parents and children or a ruler and his


subjects.” Harper also quotes the Oxford English Dictionary’s note about the lack of fixity in the Vulgate’s translations of *dilectio*, *caritas*, and *agape*, rendering all of them, four times to one, as “love” instead of “charity.” Even if the Greek terms were translated consistently into a fixed set of Latin terms to minimize the ambiguity of love’s different forms, the Latin terms, themselves, embody the same laxity between the chaste and sexual intonation in the definitions of love. *Amor*, for example, embodies this dichotomy in the definition by Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short’s *A Latin Dictionary*, which includes, even as it differentiates, its high and low senses, its internal as opposed to external meanings, and, specifically, its chasteness and sexuality wherein the latter is further rendered ambiguous as lawful or unlawful. This indistinctness in the Latin is further captured in the Oxford English Dictionary’s identification of “love” as


386 Ibid.

387 *Amor*: “I. love (of friends, parents, etc., and also in a low sense; hence in gen., like amo, while *caritas*, like *diligere*, is esteem, regard, etc.; hence amor is used also of brutes, but *caritas* only of men …” and, further, “… (but *amor* is related to benevolentia as the cause to the effect, since benevolentia designates only an external, friendly treatment; but amor a real, internal love) …” finally, in its literary usage, they differentiate in *paternitatis amore*, brotherly love, from sexual love, whether awful or unlawful. They designate its secondary meanings to include: A. For the beloved object itself; B. Personified: Amor, the god of love, *Love*, *Cupid*, *Eros*; C. A strong, passionate longing for something, desire, lust; and D. Poetical, a love-charm, philter (Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, founded on Andrews’ edition of Freund’s Latin Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879)). *Cupīdo* and *Libido* both follow this same model of bifurcation with a differentiation of good desire as desire, wish, longing, and eagerness from bad desire as desire, passion, lust, and greed, in the first case, and between pleasure, desire, and longing versus unlawful desire, inordinate desire, and lust (Ibid.). This same encompassing of chaste and sexual love in the definitions is echoed in Hebrew, as well, for example in the verb that transliterates as ‘*ahab*, which includes, amongst its many definitions, familial and sexual love for another human, human appetite, human love for God, God’s love for humanity, and the act of being a friend as chaste or as lover (Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, ed. James Strong (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007). Gesenius’ lexicon beautifully defines ‘*ahab*, primarily, as “To desire, to breathe after anything,” and secondarily, simply, as to love,” and finally, “to delight in anything, in doing anything,” where this can designate “to be loved, amiable,” as in 2 Sam. 1:23 or as a friend or lover; it further notes its root to be mostly unused in Hebrew but indicative of the production of fruit and flowers and that which is verdant and “germinating with impetus, shooting forth” (quoted in Ibid.).
etymologically derived from both the Latin *lubet*, pleasing, and *lubido*, desire or libido.\footnote{It further includes separate, brief entries for *agape*, *eros*, and *storge*; but, the first two simply highlight the terms’ uses for Christian festivals and the mythological god of love with only the last offering a more standard definition, i.e., “Natural affection, *esp.* that of parents for their offspring.”}

In light of the non-rigidity of definitions for the various terms for love across different languages, this project feels justified in employing some of this ambiguity in its own definition of *eros*: the term is not assuredly chaste, yet it is not limited to being a definition of mere sexual love.

I feel confident that this interpretation of *eros* is likewise validated by its long history of conceptual interpretation. The dominant aspect of *eros* that this project seeks to maintain and emphasize from this tradition is its necessary implication of a relationship founded by an unique directedness and response that then founds and motivates action. I use the term *eros* rather than the other variants of love because its indication of the sexual alongside other impulses, which serves to best underscore the necessity of a specific intentional object to which one is most intently directed. The other terms for love lack this emphasis as they can more easily be used to indicate general and vague objects (children, a nation, etc.) and with greater looseness of necessity (a love of all children in history or one’s country in the past and future). *Eros* more clearly designates *you* are my obsession, *now*; I want *you* and want *you* to want *me* and I will immediately try to act upon it to engage, maintain, and increase this reciprocity.

*Eros’* indication of an utter reciprocity also best promises the possibility of transformation: the two of us into one. This possibility may also owe its expression to the sexual intonation of *eros* and its incorporation of the transformative dimension of love as the cause of ecstasy. It is possible that other affectations may achieve this same series of attributes, but it will be demonstrated through this chapter that *eros* is the most
effective state and term and provides the greatest point of commonality for dialogue between the texts of Pseudo-Dionysius and Lyotard. Both thinkers, in the face of that which exceeds reason’s grasp, seek a powerful engagement with the other that will permit some means of comprehension. The knowledge they seek is more like a communion than a definitional mode of expression. The relationship that is founded by eros is likewise a knowing that is a radical conjoining with the other. The history of philosophy has repeatedly affirmed eros to invoke a most powerful mode of intentionality, although the nature of its knowledge yielded and the self and the other thus intended do vary between accounts.

The relationship between love and knowledge, however complex, has been asserted from its conception in Plato. Socrates, who reputedly declared himself ignorant, insisting, “I have no claim to wisdom, great or small,” in the Apology, announces, in the Symposium, that there is one thing of which he knows: love—“love is the one thing in the world I understand …” What is the nature of the knowing of his knowing of love? What is the nature of knowledge that love is tied to, by etymology and the account of love’s parentage, if knowledge requires its object to be fixed and love’s object is absent? Philosophy is, etymologically, the love of wisdom; philosophers, then, are wisdom’s lovers and wisdom is our beloved. If wisdom is knowledge, like that which the Meno instructs us to keep chained as it is so quick to flight like the statues of Daedalus, we philosophers must forever be bereft of it, for our love implies its content to be a lack, to

be the precise opposite to captured statues.  This is the standard critique that contemporary philosophy poses to the Platonic conception of eros. This critique, however, ignores the fact that eros is born of both Poros and Penia: “as the son of Resource and Need, it has been his fate to always be needy … [but] he brings his father’s resourcefulness to his designs upon the beautiful … at once desirous and full of wisdom …”  

Eros may be a privation, but its object and content are neither nonexistent nor vacant of attributes and potential for action. Eros’ nature is akin to the compatible contradiction in Pseudo-Dionysius’ depiction of God both as and exceeding any attribute and to Lyotard’s witness’ testimony that is both speechless and overfull of speech.

Yet, the remaining question, what is the nature of the knowing of his knowing of love, is rendered more urgent in light of eros being both a poverty and plenitude of knowledge at once. Logic declares this formula to contain a contradiction and be an impossibility: if a is not-b and b is not-a, c cannot be both a and b at once. Even to designate eros as an attribute of being or a potential state rather than its actual state of being itself does little to ease the problem, for we neither sensibly speak of a woman having on a dress and not having on a dress at once nor of a man both having the ability to play the guitar and not having the ability to play the guitar at once. Nevertheless, it is sensible for us to conceive of eros as both a lack and plenitude at once. Therefore, this project classifies this meaningful understanding of eros as a knowing that is situated within the passions as opposed to reason. This use is justified by this project’s

---


392 Cf. the beginning of this section, the concluding remarks of chapter one, section six, and chapter three, section one for further argumentation concerning the differentiation of passions from reason.
definition of mysticism, delineated in chapter three, as that which cannot be put into words and thereby propels one, with all of one’s passion or faith, to endlessly attempt to put it into words. Mysticism’s object evades empirical demonstration as its expression evades a language that promotes a rigid one to one correspondence between a sign and referent. Instead, as de Certeau argued, mysticism is the very “conjunction of a passion (which desires and suffers the other) with a meaning (which is offered or refused),” which posits mysticism as an erotic relation and “… introduces an erotic element into the field of knowledge. It impassions the discourse of knowledge.”393 The knowledge thus impassioned is, as Anselm deduces from the Psalms, one we “know in our hearts.”394 This does not discount the rational arguments that Anselm, Pseudo-Dionysius, Lyotard, and others make; it merely affirms that its truth exceeds reason even if it provides the raw data that can be submitted to reason and, with which, reason then may work.

The erotic relationship is infinitely entangled with the relation of knowledge and both relations invoke the question of the nature of the relating, that is, a question of intentionality. Love, like knowledge, is love of someone or something. Plato’s notion of eros is clearly intentional insofar as it is a direction by one to his or her lack of the other. But, is this direction truly towards the other, him or herself, towards the self’s lack of the other, towards the self’s desired end with the other, or towards the self’s representation of the other, or, otherwise, still? It has been argued that the Symposium’s “ladder of love” reveals that the erotic relationship does not yield knowledge through an intentional direction of one person to another, but that this merely trains us to learn of an universal


394 “The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God” (Psalm 14:1, which is the counterpoint for Anselm’s ontological proof for His existence, cf. Anselm, Proslogion, with Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm).
love. This raises a question as to whether *eros* is, truly, the best indication of the specificity of a relation that says: *I love you*, here, now, and in such a way that *I want you* to love *me* and will act so as to encourage this end. This demands a closer investigation into the nature of intentionality.

For Husserl, “The peculiarity of the intensive mental process is easily designated in its universality; we all understand the expression ‘consciousness of something,’ especially in ad libitum exemplifications.” Likewise, Danto easily captures the basic essence of erotic intentionality as “since to love is to love something, there must in every case be something that is the object of love.” Love, he argues, is like belief; therefore, love is an intentional state, but, just as Husserl also posits that ‘Consciousness of something’ is therefore something obviously understandably of itself and, at the same time, highly enigmatic,” Danto concludes, quite unlike other interpretations, that this makes love’s object the content of that state. This means that love intends one’s representations of the beloved, “the lover loves the beloved only as he or she represents the latter. The beloved is then the individual represented—or misrepresented—by the lover.” While this interpretation of the nature of the other loved easily permits us to conceive of loving a fictional or unknowable being, it prohibits love from founding something like an ontological proof of the existence of the other or using love as a means

---


397 Husserl, *Ideas I, Op. Cit.*, §87. Husserl’s clarification of its enigmatic nature is partially captured in his following section’s elucidation and expresses its tie to knowledge: “Owing to its noetic moments, every intensive mental process is precisely noetic; it is of its essence to include in itself something such as a ‘sense’ and possibly a manifold sense on the basis of this sense-bestowal and, in unity with that, to effect further productions [Leistungen] which become ‘senseful’ precisely by <this sense-bestowal>” (*Ibid.*, §88).

398 *Ibid*. Here one can emphasize the difference between *eros* and the sexual act; it is the latter that can better capture the immediacy of flesh than the former.
thorough which to attain an immediacy of or with the other. For this project, *eros* as a potential solution to grasping the ineffable, this conception’s permission of extending the relation to all that we can represent, even if we cannot empirically demonstrate, aids the project. God and “Auschwitz” are two inexpressibles that evade empirical demonstration; this project, however, is precisely seeking how one represents them and a representation that permits misrepresentation is required since both, by nature, exceed their encapsulation. This definition of intentionality’s prohibition against immediacy prohibits one conception of the faithful’s goal of divine union, however, the possibility of any language expressing immediacy, as was explored through Kristeva and Proust, above, has already been addressed and found to not violate the overall productivity of *eros* as a potential solution for expressing the inexpressible.

The intentionality of *eros*, however, can also be conceived as a relation that better approximates immediacy between individuals, even if it cannot maintain this modality when it is re-presented or expressed as such. This definition of intentionality explores how the reciprocity of the parties undermines the typical subject-object and active-passive conceptions of knowledge. Each gives oneself to the other rather than being passive matter determined by the other alone. Conceiving this relation erotically, the nature of the parties is better conceived as a full communion between two that founds knowledge and action rather than a relation of the intellectual conjunction of perspectives, that is, as a relation wherein love expresses the content of representations.

A relation of complete communion is best expressed through George Bataille’s definition of eroticism as “the quest for continuity of existence …”

---

cannot be conceived of as purely sexual or biological. Instead, Bataille carefully differentiates strictly physical eroticism and emotional eroticism from his object of inquiry, true eroticism, which he designates as religious eroticism. It is the true eroticism because the quest for continuity “systematically pursued beyond the immediate world signifies an essentially religious intention.” He does not indicate any specific creed or interpretation of religion, but seeks to capture the impulse and movement by which creation is called to and does seek the love of its creator. Outside of a reunion, the state of humanity is as dissolution; thus, erotic desire is the desire for “a fusion where both are mingled, attaining at length the same degree of dissolution. The whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives,” which is as isolated. The non-erotic dissolution is isolation whereas the dissolution attained through the erotic fusion is ecstatic union beyond individuality. This definition of the intentionality at work in the erotic relationship better captures the spirit of eros at work in Pseudo-Dionysius and Lyotard.

_Eros_, then, here, is to be understood as the relationship founded by an intentionality, an unique directedness and response between two parties, that provokes the parties to action. _Eros_ precedes by a relation that can be described as one of knowledge that is less the order of reason and more that of the passions and indicates a state of affected being. This state of being affected by another commands one to take a stand, which is to say, to act upon one’s knowing and being in the world in regard to the

---

400 _Ibid._ One may argue that eroticism may be religious but that religion is not erotic; this, however, is hard to support. In brief, while two opposing trends in religion, mysticism and asceticism, may practice faith in divergent manners, abide by opposing rituals, both are religiously engaged in an erotic quest for union with the Other. Mysticism demands ecstasy to achieve divine union and asceticism demands a sensuous disinterest that cannot function outside of the central erotic principles of prohibition and transgression.

401 _Ibid.,_ 17.
other. The call to action generated by the erotic relationship can be expressed as the drive to union with the other. This union, be it understood as the religious, divine union with God as in Pseudo-Dionysius’ mystical framework or as the survivor’s union with the unthinkable horror of Auschwitz within Lyotard’s framework of the event, in both cases, indicates a coming together that defies reason and yields a knowledge of that which we so desire (for reunion, understanding, or memorializing) and that which so eludes us.

The testimony from the survivor or the faithful cannot simply mimic the example of Proust and just generate the sensation of knowing in his or her skeptic, judge, and jury. This may persuade them and yield a single successful win here or there, but it will not withstand their close scrutiny according to their own rules. This persuasion is not the erotic relationship that this project will proceed to explore more closely. Instead, the erotic relationship must be conceived between the survivor and faithful and their respective objects, that is, between Auschwitz and God. The initial discomfort of conceiving the relationship between the survivor and her site of the event that she survived as erotic will be overcome by consideration of it as a preeminent, nonreligious example of a humanly desperate, passionately motivated attempt to express that which exceeds its expression (for Auschwitz is far more than a place, even a place where horror took place), even as one is called, crucially, in many ways (enforcing or creating law, ethics, penning history, creating memorial, etc.) to express it.402

402 This project has nothing to do with theoretical possibilities or historical cases of sadomasochism aroused by the atrocity of the holocaust. For consideration of that topic, cf., notably the film “The Night Porter” (1974) by Liliana Cavani, its discussion in Kriss Ravetto, The Unmaking of Fascist Aesthetics (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), and its broader consideration in the two volumes of Klaus Theweleit, Male Fantasies, trans. Stephen Conway, Erica Carter, and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987 and 1989).
The expression of the inexpressible will be generated through the engagement of an erotic relationship with the desired object so as to try and yield a knowledge that transcends its limitations. This knowledge will found their testimony. To succeed as testimony, that is, as an account given to others according to their rules and by a way in which they can understand it, if possible at all, it will have to give a knowledge akin to the consummation of desire: all of *eros*’ truth, born in a passionate knowing, turned over to reason’s cogitations wherein it can be ordered and fixed, chained tight, and readily re-presentable. The possibility of the successful transformation of a passionate knowledge to a rational knowledge is highly contested and, further, whether the transformation can preserve the former’s truth is best thought to be impossible.

Lyotard’s *The Differend* proposes some examples of differends that can be arbitrated and, therefore, basically overcome. Nevertheless, the notion of the differend itself rejects the possibility of its being bridged. Most strictly, my proposition of a symbiosis of silence and eros to overcome the differend of Auschwitz must fail; even as its precise failure eludes me in this chapter, its existence must be, by definition. This partially accounts for why the continuing chapter focuses upon silence and *eros* as the most productive option, as opposed to the method, by which to testify to the ineffable. The remaining explanation for the lack of assertion of its success is that that there is an ultimate productivity uncovered in the analysis of *eros*’ activity: that intentional erotic relation, inseparable from the pursuit of wisdom, feeds its own maintenance and serves to keep alive what inexpressibility lets fade. Luce Irigaray poignantly captures this insight, despite minor divergences, when investigating the name of the other in her work, *The Way of Love*:
The rift between the other and me is irreducible. To be sure we can build bridges, join our energies, feast and celebrate encounters, but the union is never definitive, on pain of no longer existing. Union implies returning into oneself, moving away, dissenting, separating. To correspond with one’s own becoming requires an alteration of approaching the other and dividing from him, or her.  

Even in light of the impossibility of union, defined by the conception of the differend, we can still succeed, before failure sets in, when engaged in steady alteration, an endless series of trials. This optimism in the face of inevitable failure is implicit in Lyotard’s concluding lines to *The Differend*:

> But the occurrence doesn’t make a story, does it? –Indeed, it’s not a sign. But it is to be judged, all the way through to its incomparability. You can’t make a political “program” with it, but you can bear witness to it. –And what if no one hears the testimony, etc. (No. 1ff.)? –Are you prejudging the *Is it happening* (§264)?

Therefore, in light of this awareness of necessary failure for an option of silence and *eros*, nevertheless so productive so as to here evade revealing its error, and the revelation of the option’s own elucidation as a more fundamental productivity for expressing the inexpressible, this dissertation finds its success: in providing a means to expressing the inexpressible through either the symbiosis of silence and *eros* itself as a solution that currently lacks the identification of its failure or the activity of *eros* as spiritual exercise.

Synthesizing this either/or into a both/and, the rest of this chapter will seek to elaborate the speaking of a passionate testimony that has to cultivate the audience’s understanding while simultaneously erasing itself in order to permit its logical coagulation of sensation into understanding. As cultivation, the testimony must call to the audience. This call will also grant them permission to feel and process its words, that is, to understand them. The call of her testimony is its linkages, its capacity to come into

---

play in the system of comprehension. But, this testimony, like desire, points to an object that is both lacking and greater than itself: the faithful cannot express the inexpressibility of God as the survivor can neither demonstrate her death when she comes before them as living or either way express the totality of Auschwitz. Thus, the testimony is absent demonstration even as it must give them something, link to other phrases so as to be meaningful, provide them with knowledge. It must be crafted to speak, so as to call, yet not to speak, as that speech is impossible. Can a testimony be just that, an account of the witness, and silent at once?
4.3. Lyotard on the Possibility of a Just Silence

“What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence”
—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.*404

“What cannot be put into words should not be suppressed”
—Jean-Luc Marion, *L'idole et la distance.*405

Our notion of justice often hinges on being able to tell one’s own side of the story: it is only fair! Thus, we dictate that every trial must have, at odds, two sides that can be told. There must also be an impartial arbitrator even as we require each party to act rationally. We demand the suspension of bias and set aside hasty dichotomies of right and wrong. We envision objectivity as determining truth to be a balance of the two sides: a scale, not the merchant’s but Lady Justice’s, perfectly leveled, even while our task is to name a winner and condemn a loser. But why does justice have to be truth and a perfect balance? A perfect equalizing of positions? Lady Justice stands, often blindfolded, with a scale in one hand to balance each side of the case by their respective merits and drawbacks. But, she also stands with a sword in the other hand and her breasts bared. She reveals herself to you; is her partial nudity seductive or a sign of radical openness? She reveals herself to you as she judges you; she does not hide her sword, her capacity to enforce her judgment. She reveals herself to you even as, alongside her threat of reason and fairness, she cannot hide her vulnerability, her blindness, which is also her perfection as ultimate arbitrator. Lady Justice’s revelations strike a discordant note: appealing and


intimidating, at once; a sign of love and threat of violence, at once; a capacity to judge and incapacity to see, at once. If we listen to these revelations, we hear that the balance of justice is more than a simple balance. Beyond the crass scale in the market place of judgments, the scale of justice is the promise of something more powerful, more pure, beautiful and terrifying, a true justice. Beyond economy, the scale of justice is erotic.

The classical representations are not substantial evidence, though, for justice’s eroticism. But, it is theoretically sound to understand justice as a balance, be it of truth or obedience to predetermined rules, and, therefore, as a relationship of power. Power has been read as a tool of violence and domination persistently throughout the canon. Here, I wish to explore how eroticism, also a relationship of power, is a counter to violence and one that better expresses how positivity can issue from redefinitions of balance. Perfect justice, balanced and blind, is as uncommon as utopia; imbalances of justice are common, while mass anarchy is not. A relationship of violence is not the necessary result of unequal power. Eroticism, then, can better capture this state of power relationships under imbalance. Eroticism’s equalization of its partners never resembles a perfect equality; its only balance is in the form of a slowly swaying back and forth of power relations. One side dominating by virtue of his domination by the other side; the other side dominated by her virtue of her domination over him.

Typically, injustice is seen as a tilting of the scales, often the result of one or more parties being unable to tell their sides of the story. “You are informed that human beings endowed with language were placed in a situation such that none of them is now able to tell about it” (§1). And, one side’s lack of testimony does not cancel the other’s but, rather, ignites it. Revisionists, like Faurisson, seize upon silence to demand how one can
know of the existence of gas chambers, death camps, the Final Solution, and so forth, if no one can come forward and prove it, by which they mean, come forward and show it, tell about it, so that its truth can be determined? Obviously! No witness to a gas chamber can testify: its victim would be dead, forever silenced. And survivors? To what would they testify? Not death. They find themselves as silenced as those whose lips were sealed by death (§§1, 14). Why can their physical life, itself, not let them testify to death? First, why can anyone find oneself unable to testify? One, perhaps, cannot speak. One could choose to not speak by pure choice alone or as the result of being threatened (§14). There are many possibilities because this silence is wholly unlike how a stone is unable to speak (§15). Why, then, can one or does one not tell one’s side of the story? Silence upends the scale of justice, which says that truth needs its demonstration. In one’s reticence, the court can only determine that that testimony to be untrue. That testimony was silent, it demonstrated nothing but was deemed existent enough to be judged against.

Lyotard offers us a conceptually elusive infinity of interpretations of silence because, he notes, “Silence does not indicate which instance is denied…” (§26). To ask the reason for her silence is explore only one event of silence. Instead, to explore the multiplicitious nature of being silenced, we ask the question of what is the logic behind the survivor’s not speaking? Logically, the survivor’s silence “substitutes for phrases,” and the “phrase replaced by silence would be a negative one” (§24). Silence negates at least one of the four instances in a phrase universe: the addressee, the referent (ta pragmata), the sense (der Sinn), or the addressor (§25). The addressee can be silenced by

---

the addressee or referent that is ‘none of his business’ (§26). The addressee can find herself silenced by sense, in a “senseless, inexpressible” situation where “there is nothing to say about it,” or by the referent, where it is not her own “business to be talking about it” (§26). Or, silence may result from a combination of these reasons because there may be more than one negation or one negation at work in more than one instance within the structure of the phrase universe. A negation becomes most frustrating when its silence prohibits any of the other instances to point toward the idiom wherein it would not be silenced. Only by coming to better understand the relation between the phrase universe and its negations can we begin to uncover and judge the options for the survivor’s speech. Amongst these options, we seek a properly expressive idiom that could slip into the instances obstructed by silence. The bind of silence is a violent gag that can be soothed by bringing speech to the censored mouth. This therapy may also permit silence to slip from its role as a symptom of oppression. For silence, too, is a phrase; sometimes it shows only negation, obstructs an instance, or blocks meaning’s linkage, but sometimes it expresses when words cannot and what words cannot express (§§24, 26, 105, 110). Why can the witness not turn her vicious bind into these latter sometimes of silence; let them speak her impossible meaning without the destruction sound wrecks on the non-demonstrable?

Silence is a wrong, an exemplar of injustice, when it negates one or more instances in a phrase universe that call to be spoken. “In the differend, something ‘asks’ to be put into phrases, and suffers from the wrong of not being able to be put into phrases right away” (§23). As a wrong, silence’s injustice can be understood as the abatement of the force of justice, of that striving against an inability to speak. A wrong begets pain;
often, simultaneously with our awareness that the phrase we need does not yet exist. This
silence hurts; a new idiom brings pleasure. Lyotard argues that the experience of pain
and pleasure of the wrong teaches that they do not use language, but are used by it; it
summons them, not to all that they know, but to the recognition that “what needs to be
phrased exceeds what they can presently phrase, and that they must be allowed to
institute idioms which do not yet exist” (§23). Being silenced is a learning experience.408
When a child gets an answer right, we say, she has learned it. But, this does not mean
that she does not learn answers that are wrong and learn through answering incorrectly.
Likewise, a wrong is not pain, alone, but also that which permits the possibility of
pleasure. A wrong is not obliterated in speech because its obliteration is the realization of
not being able to obliterate it. Silence brings us to know that its alleviation is beyond us
but yet we must be permitted into this beyond. Silence is much like desire as it points
outside of itself to that which will undo it and, yet, that which it wants.409

Silence cannot be held only in the category of the unjust and as the enemy of
testimony. It cannot be conceived only as a violence done unto the witness. It is also
something that is meaningful and propulsive. The phrase universe sketches a system of
power where the negation of instances can render injustices. Instead of interpreting this

407 Lyotard does not elaborate on the “pleasure which accompanies the invention of a new idiom” (§23),
whether pleasure is only resultant from that which erases the negative instance in the phrase universe and
soothes the violent bind, or, if it results from the creation of any phrase, even one that fails to restore the
linkages the permit meaningfulness. I would argue that his work necessitates pleasure to have gradations.
Even if his silence can operate metaphorically, Lyotard designates literal instances. For literal silence, any
sound is its destruction; if its destruction entails pleasure, then speaking any idiom would be pleasurable.
Clearly, though, for the witness, the most pleasure would be an idiom that the tribunal would understand.

408 Albeit, one Lyotard describes through a composition of behaviorist categories fit into a pragmatic
system that echoes an experience of the Kantian sublime while yielding insights of Heideggerian
linguistics.

409 Desire embodies pleasure and pain akin to how the unending linkages of phases is as painful (§17) as
silence; that to which it points as solution cannot undo it.
system only through the lens that shows silence as violence, we should become voyeurs who can be called by silence and call through it meaningful linkages that evade their demonstration. This will permit something like a love story to unfold inside of the logical system of speech that is meaningful even as it points beyond the bounds of understanding.

To open this possibility of silence as pleasure, we must clear the obstructions from the witness’ silence that prohibit its linkage into meaningfulness. According to the binds imposed by Faurisson, the witness’ silence only means proof of the nonexistence of the case. But, Lyotard shows that silence can occupy any instance or many within the phrase universe and “can just as well testify against the addressor’s authority … the authority of the witness him- or herself … [as it can testify] against language’s ability to signify gas chambers (an inexpressible absurdity)” (§27). To validate these possibilities of silence, Faurisson’s logical bind must be cut: we must “establish the existence of the gas chambers” by withdrawing “the four silent negations” (§27). This renders a new dialogue, one that undoes the condemnation by making the silences speak “yes:”

There were no gas chambers, were there? Yes, there were. –But even if there were, that cannot be formulated, can it? Yes, it can. –But even if it can be formulated, there is no one, at least, who has the authority to formulate it, and no one with the authority to hear it (it is not communicable), is there? Yes, there is (§27).

Seeking the logic behind silence, Lyotard uncovered the possibilities for absent phrases within the whole of instances of a survivor’s phrase universe. To lift the muting bind, we must ensure the possibility of speaking each of these possible absences, even if the possibility currently exceeds our capacities (§23). To ensure the possibility is to establish the possible “reality of a referent,” in each instance of the phrase universe by erasing the
imposition of obstructions (§28). Lyotard instructs us to work through the complete phrasing of the witness’ testimony, erasing its negations; thus, work through the establishment of existence, “in reverse order: there is someone to signify the referent and someone to understand the phrase that signifies it; the referent can be signified; it exists” (§28). The logical bind is much like a trap, from which one cannot escape. Lyotard moves forward in his solution by treating the trap more like a dead end in a maze; he turns her testimony around and works back through it to eliminate every wrong turn. This method will not deliver her to the finish line, but take her back to the start to begin again. Ultimately, this method will permit Lyotard to reveal the type of game that Faurisson’s revisionism is playing, differentiate it from other genres of language games, and determine its rules. This knowledge will permit him to know the rules to which the witness’ testimony must conform and which of his own rules that Faurisson violates.  

This knowledge may teach us what idiom the witness needs.

Lyotard is revealing the depth to which silence can lurk. Faurisson’s logical bind presented a flat concept of logic where truth is determined by demonstration and demonstration consists in an addressee presenting the referent and its sense to the addressee. Within this strictness, the addressee’s silence is condemning: either she is

---

410 Faurisson claims to be operating within a logical “game” (in Lyotard and Wittgenstein’s sense, as a mode of language, amongst others, that operates by its own rules) as opposed to sociological, psychological, or biological games. But, Lyotard reveals that the logical game must be differentiated from the rhetorical and the scientific, which Faurisson does not do and, thus, obfuscates their rules (§24, 28-30). Lyotard elaborates their distinct rules through an analysis of Wittgenstein, Gorgias, historians, and Plato; a single, clear example can be demonstrated by reference to Wittgenstein’s differentiation, in his Philosophical Investigations, of how the linguistic form “X in Y” can mislead us because it is invalid for some contents; for instance, “pain in my hand” is a language game distinct from “car in my garage,” and entails entirely different rules for comprehension and use. Faurisson’s slip into the scientific game misuses forms like “X in Y,” through presuming the phrase “death in a gas chamber” operates identically to “bacteria in the Petri dish.” Lyotard’s example is exclaiming “inhuman!” to testimony’s about Auschwitz; “Inhuman” means incompatible with an Idea of humanity,” not that the testimonies were not about real humans or did not “offer material for verification, even if they are incompatible with any Idea of humanity” (§31).
guilty of contempt, or the referent doesn’t exist, or it does not mean what she alleges; regardless, any option proves Faurisson’s claim. If this was an accurate representation of logic, any lawyer could work through the bind, string together enough of the witness’ idioms to present a case, and then dismiss Faurisson’s as frivolous; Lyotard would not waste his time on such considerations. Instead, Lyotard engages with Faurisson’s bind to show how, despite its pallor, it does point to something theoretically vicious and worthy of philosophical attention. Faurisson’s differend could be undone, but it points beyond itself to one that is truly impassable because language is not a simple system with a single source of authority wherein silence may block one or more of four instances and render something permanently inarticulate.

Instead, language must be conceived of more like the night sky: the cosmos that one sees, that one knows one does not see, and that one could imagine when laying upon one’s back in the damp grass in one’s hometown. It is a vast scatter of stars and planets in regular flux and subject to the unexpected change, but it is also determined by the existentially situated person who uses it and its use. Its system is neither rigid nor totalizing, and we can speak of discrete systems within it. Lyotard’s conception of this system is that, like the infinity of stars and planets, there are innumerable phrases. A phrase is not just a clause of words; phases include speech acts, gestures, the flick of a cat’s tail, a mathematical formula, and so forth. Phrases are constituted by rules; these rules are the phrase’s regimen. Regimens can include “reasoning, knowing, describing, recounting, questioning, showing, ordering, etc.” (p. xii). These regimes can be entirely heterogeneous to one another, in which case, no translation of phrases is possible from

411 Further: “It’s daybreak; Give me the lighter; Was she there? … ax²+bx+c=0; Ouch! … This is not a phrase; Here are some phrases” (§109) and, the “raised tail of a cat” (§123).
one to the other. It is possible, however, to link heterogeneous phase regimes. Such linkages are determined in accordance with an end that is prescribed by a genre of discourse. Genres of discourse supply the rules to link heterogeneous phrases; these rules are determined by their fact of being proper for a set goal, for instance, to know, to teach, or to seduce. For example, the genre of dialogue can link ostensive phrases to a question to the goal of coming to an agreement with the addressee about the sense of a referent. But, when one attempts to construct concrete examples, the true murkiness of common speech becomes apparent. Everyday language employs numerous phrases, complex regimens, and multiple genres in even the briefest, mundane exchanges.412

“Language … [is] the house of Being,” Heidegger wrote, capturing how naturally we live in language and illustrating the degree to which communication is no more foreign to us than doors and floorboards.413 Thus, its murkiness is only put into relief when we engage this delineation as a philosophical exercise or when we are called to fix a wrong. Wrongs signal a breakdown in the use of language: A phrase happens. Provoked, an addressor initiates a genre of dialogue (in accordance with an end it has determined) by supplying X, Y, and Z as possible phrases (that are in accord to their rules given by the genre). The addressee, however, responds in a fictive genre (in accordance with an end it has determined) by supplying 1, 2, and 3 as possible phrases (that are in accord to their rules given by the genre). X, Y, and Z cannot communicate with 1, 2, and 3. This creates a differend that calls for a linkage. If the linkage cannot happen, no further phrases can occur, and a wrong is committed.

412 While his language cannot be accused of being mundane, Lyotard describes his own genre (in the singular) in The Differend as “Observations, Remarks, Thoughts, and Notes” (p. xiv).

Differends happen frequently due to the immense mutability of language. Faurisson’s overly simplistic logical bind, that the living witness cannot testify to her own death, illustrates a heterogeneity that arrests communication and issues a differend: the witness is forced into a genre of language wholly foreign to the tribunal and entirely repellant to translation. However, the greater differend within Faurisson’s revisionism is not captured by the illogicality of being an eyewitness to one’s own death. Instead, his bind only provides contrast to highlight the radical limit of meaning one confronts with the differend of Auschwitz.

Limits, we can only bump up against; we can never span them, so as to justly size them up and think them through. We experience them much like the first moment of Kant’s sublime: reason is overwhelmed by fear and awe. A limit is no different than a differend, except to designate one that is not overcome: for how does one establish, let alone validate, the existence, boundaries, and truth of a differend like Auschwitz?

“Validation is a genre of discourse, not a phrase regimen. No phrase is able to be validated from inside its own regimen: a descriptive is validated cognitively only by recourse to an ostensive (And here is the case)” (§41). 414 And what if this ostensive is the invisible? What if the description blurs the boundaries of its rules (eliminating the

414 While Lyotard’s text actively dialogues with Wittgenstein, there is a notably accord with the work of his contemporaries, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s A Thousand Plateaus. Lyotard’s phrases, Wittgenstein’s sentences, and Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptual regimes parallel one another; all are expressions broadly understood as linguistic that found and operate within a structure. Lyotard’s phrases most explicitly include the nonverbal, but the others would not disagree. Lyotard’s phrase universes, Wittgenstein’s context, and Deleuze and Guattari’s semiotic systems likewise parallel one another; all are the theoretical containment around their respective signs or phrases. Finally, Lyotard’s differend and Wittgenstein’s ‘that of which we must not speak’ parallel Deleuze and Guattari’s potentially inexpressible ‘form of content’ they broach when discussing the difficulty of interiorized validation: “A regime of signs constitutes a semiotic system. But it appears difficult to analyze semiotic systems in themselves: there is always a form of content that is simultaneously inseparable from and independent of the form of expression …” (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 111).
distinction between the imaginary and real, ignoring the material and sensory, concluding with a prayer)? What if the cognitive expounds an absent and impossible referent?

“The silence that surrounds the phrase, *Auschwitz was the extermination camp* is not a state of mind (*état d’âme*), it is the sign that something remains to be phrased which is not, something which is not determined” (§93). The indeterminacy of this phrase, and the violence its silence ensues, calls to us to found the phrases that can link with it and give it meaning, even as its indeterminacy and silence precisely result from the inability to discover or create these phrases. This stings especially because Lyotard’s demonstration of the state of the witness reveals two parts, like the sublime: first, the violent silencing, and second, the vertiginous realization that phrasing is, in fact, endless.415 Were the differend more mundane, it is conceivable that enough of these phrases could be compounded so as to construct a web of meaning to throw light to even its most obscured elements. *Auschwitz* is different.

This confrontation with that which is allergic to expression and systematization reveals the “inadequacy of linguistic presuppositions” that made us believe that if it was, we could express it and, if we could express it, it was comprehensible.416 Yet, when the system of language confronts something radically unique, it falters, the possibilities of communication break down. Language may continue, but something is lost; there is either an elephant in the room or a conceptually insurmountable absence, an obstruction

---

415 “… the irrefutable conviction that phrasing is endless” (§17). Deleuze and Guattari capture the cause of the endlessness as the possibility of linkage itself: “There is a simple formula for the signifying regime of the sign (the signifying sign): every sign refers to another sign, and only to another sign, ad infinitum. That is why, at the limit, one can forgo the notion of the sign, for what is retained is not principally the sign’s relation to a state of things it designates, or to an entity it signifies, but only the formal relation of sign to sign insofar as it defines a so-called signifying chain. The limitlessness of signification replaces the sign” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Op. Cit., 112).

or equally perplexing nothing. Neither can be ignored, but neither can be comprehended and phrased. Nevertheless, our impulse is to try: the search must continue for another universe of phrases.

The witness’ bind reveals that she cannot express the inexpressible in the manner a child could point to her broken tricycle and say, *brother broke it*, or, *here, look!* Those forms of testimony are comprised of denominative and ostensive phrases. They are better employed within the logical genre of language use—that which Faurisson wished to use and that which is antithetical to any productive linking for the witness. Even switching into the different and distinct genre of the cognitive phrase regimen, wherein phrases *signify*, fails to aide the victim. “The ‘revisionist’ historians understand as applicable to this name [Auschwitz] only the cognitive rules for the establishment of historical reality and for the validation of its sense” (§93). While it is a historical occurrence and real place, its meaning cannot be validated in these strictures, which would deny its range of meanings that extends beyond them. Lyotard warns us that the revisionists will dismiss the importance of further possible meaning, that:

They will say that history is not made of feelings, and that it is necessary to establish the facts. But, with Auschwitz, something new has happened in history (which can only be a sign and not a fact), which is that the facts, the testimonies which bore the traces of *here’s* and *now’s*, the documents which indicated the sense or senses of the facts, and the names, finally the possibility of various kinds of phrases whose conjunction makes reality, all this has been destroyed as much as possible (§93).

So, we must “break with the monopoly over history granted to the cognitive regime of phrases, and he or she must venture forth by lending his or her ear to what is not presentable under the rules of knowledge” (§93). But what regime is left to make sense of what we hear?
While we have discarded the regimens governing ostensive, denominative, and now the cognitive phrases, this does not mean that we can only turn to nonsense. To the contrary:

_Auschwitz is the most real of realities in this respect. Its name marks the confines wherein historical knowledge sees its competence impugned. It does not follow from that that one falls into non-sense. The alternative is not: either the signification that learning [science] establishes, or absurdity, be it of the mystical kind (§93)._

We do not need to be recluses to silence and asceticism: “phrases can obey regimes other than the logical and the cognitive. They can have stakes other than the true” (§99). What are these other regimes left us when we have shown the failures of those that govern how we typically use and judge knowledge and are instructed to not turn to those that abstract from the world and the comprehensible use of language? The only apparent path to explore is that which seeks to neither quantify the world nor leave it, but the one that engages the world in action: the genre of _praxis_.

The practical problems Auschwitz clearly present themselves as amenable to the genres concerning justice’s exercise in law and politics. But, here, too, the differend overwhelms us concerning the disparity between possible action and our motivating cause. “The differend attached to Nazi names, to _Hitler_, to _Auschwitz_, to _Eichmann_, could not be transformed into a litigation and regulated by a verdict” (§93). That is not to say that we have not taken war criminals to trial, heard testimony challenging Auschwitz’s existence, and drafted laws establishing it as a memorial. Instead, these actions simply do not speak to the differend; they respond 6:15 to a question about the nature of time. That which cannot be juridically rendered is more nebulous than any instance of a person, place, or word could capture; it concerns originary causes,
inconceivable quantities of extermination, unraveling postulations of human nature, and an overwhelming number of additional questions beyond these.

Lyotard argues that even the meaningful symbolism embedded in the concrete, founding of a State cannot elevate this phrasing into more than an address to a single effect emanating from the cause of the wrong:

By forming the State of Israel, the survivors transformed the wrong into damages and the differend into litigation. By beginning to speak in the common idiom of public international law and of authorized politics, they put an end to the silence to which they had been condemned. But the reality of the wrong suffered at Auschwitz before the foundation of this state remained and remains to be established, and it cannot be established because it is in the nature of a wrong not to be established by consensus (Nos. 7, 9) (§93).

Auschwitz is a wrong whose salvation by proper address is unattainable through the regime of practical justice. These acts can only put salve about its periphery. To address aspects of Auschwitz that are comprehensible and even to transform some of its horrors into an idiom capable of being processed by the courts, still, will never get to the originary wrong and ease it up into speech.

The attempt to work at the originary wrong through piece-work from its periphery relies upon the presumption, articulated by Lévi-Strauss, that, “the world begins to signify before anyone knows what it signifies; the signified is given without being known.”417 This suggests that we only need to keep chipping away the problem and the new idiom will be found. Such action lets us respond to the call of the differend, even if this response is only making phrases impertinent to the core of its meaning. Nevertheless, this impulse even finds encouragement from Lyotard’s assertion that silence teaches that “they must be allowed to institute idioms which do not yet exist”

But, in the face of the necessity, the radical limit of Auschwitz reveals this to be a “tragic regime,” where the limitless possibilities of signification operate over the impossibility of direct designation of the differend.  Phrases continue to link with other phrases around its periphery, but the referent the victim cannot demonstrate is a “form of content … inseparable from and independent of the form of expression.” This is, to repeat, that Auschwitz is a “descriptive” that cannot be “validated cognitively … by recourse to an ostensive (And here is the case)” (§41). The tribunal that requires a demonstration cannot hear the description of Auschwitz.

What are we left with? The standard regimes to which we would turn to know and to act, have failed. While Lyotard indicated the uselessness of nonsense, the only options left to us, in some sense, are nonsense: those genres of discourse that sought to unsettle the authority of sense and understanding, such as the writing styles of Gertrude Stein and Adorno, delineated in chapter two. Lyotard took up the consideration of these radical genres with enthusiasm and an eye that was as acute to their productivity as to their ultimate inadequacy. Phrasing is endless (§17), but is the answer proving itself to be located more within the series of failures than in further, possible idioms? Nearing the end of plausible genres of discourse to explore, is the better inquiry not another instance of trying to make sense of a differend, so isolated from universes of meaning with which we are familiar, but whether the witness could make the tribunal listen better?

---


The differend overpowers our expressive capacities. Weak, we stand before it; weaker still, are we, when it calls us to respond; weaker still, are we, when others command us to give an account of it. It robs us of speech and leaves us vulnerable to harm. The differend signals a relationship of injustice. Justice, at the start of this section, was defined as a relationship of power and was classically depicted by Lady Justice, standing blindfolded, breasts bared, a scale in one hand, a sword in her other. But, she is not the impartial judge; there is no entirely exterior and objective authority that could rule upon the differend. No, she is a site of contradiction. One of dichotomies is between the nudity and the sword. The attempt to overcome the violence resulting from the differend has led us though an examination of a series of genres of discourse that have all failed to produce and idiom that bring forth the start of the differend’s comprehension. To approach the differend as an erotic relation, however, can be to see these failures as productive. Changing the genre changes the goal and the rules assigned to its regime of phrases. Seduction is a long dialogue that requires frustrations, operates by far more than words, and whose consummation is better understood as a merger with the other than an obliteration of itself. Seduction, then, will not seek to get the right idiom to express the differend and make the tribunal understand; it will seek to persuade the tribunal to come and see the differend alongside me and through my eyes and acquiesce to me.

Step over this gulf between our language genres. Step out of your I and give yourself over to your eye. Before we were divided, bereft the possibility of translation, we were privy, together, to the phrase that happened. Before there was an I against You, we were witness to the phrase event, the *Arrive-t-il?* and *Ereignis*, “it is to it that the phrases which happen call forth” (xvi). Proust was unable to capture it in his writing, but
his descriptions of the raw immediacy are generative of desire. For Heidegger, the
presencing of Ereignis reveals the shifting of power in the relation of I to eye. The phrase
as occurrence awakens my feeling that, “oh! that is my story, too!” The immediacy is a
merger of me, who is my story, into you, who is your story. When there is no differend,
this moment becomes its opposite: “I am not your story, your story is yours.” But, in the
genre of the erotic, that second moment is postponed. In the moment, we will always
affirm that there is “At least one phrase” (§100). And, it is “in keeping silent, [that]
authentic being-one’s-self does not keep on saying ‘I,’ but rather ‘is,’” yes, more.

The persistence of failure provokes the question of its productivity and prompts
the inversion of tactics in the relationship of power from exploration to invitation. The
erotic genre of discourse invites and persuades the other to come see, through my eyes,
what I cannot say: the occurrence of the phrase event that was initiatory of the differend.
This genre of discourse is a reflection Pseudo-Dionysius’ spiritual exercise of The Divine
Names, wherein silence is not a passive nothingness, but a space cleared free that permits
desire to activate the radical stuttering that affirms and denies the names of God. This
space permits him freedom from the entanglement of logic that condemn his prayer and
solicitation to God into a mere contradicting ramble. Eros permits him freedom from the
entanglement of his materiality so as to be able to return to union with God. Pseudo-
Dionysius harmonizes contradictions without destroying them in a way to make him
worthy of becoming the model for that postmodernist who could appreciate atonality as
the acoustic and theoretical capture of an experience of suspended sublime.421

421 The importance of aesthetics to both thinkers is immense and permits only its elliptical reference, here,
to emphasize the importance of a consideration of acoustic arts to understanding their primarily linguistic
endeavor of expressing the inexpressible. The difference between standard genres of discourse and those
explored by Stein and Adorno parallels that one could draw between classical, jazz, and (predominately
In Kant’s sublime and Adorno’s culture of the sensational, Lyotard diagnoses an identical movement arising from their inverse theories: the forgetting of sensation (an anesthesia of aisthesis) that permits the sensation of a not-present presence. Lyotard introduces this reflection by considering silence as an aesthetic theme when using those two thinkers to approach the question of Heidegger’s relation to “the jews.” The forgetting of sensation is an aesthetic silence. But, sensation, as aisthesis, is the perception of formed matter that permits judgments of taste and feelings of pleasure. How can aesthetics (that judgment and feeling) proceed if its referent is forgotten (or rendered impossible)? This question brings into relief how aesthetic silence is a question of expressing the inexpressible.

422 At length, “… this theme of silence, an ‘aesthetic’ theme … touches upon a concern I share that arises from Kant’s analysis of the sublime and Adorno’s last texts, texts devoted to a critique, let’s say, of the ‘sensational.’ In both cases, it seems to me, and quite differently (almost inversely) in each, ‘sensation,’ aisthesis (as matter given in form, which occasions taste and aesthetic pleasure) is forgotten, is rendered impossible, conceals itself from its representation (through art). But this concealment lets something else show, this contradictory feeling of a ‘presence’ that is certainly not present, but which needs to be forgotten to be represented, although it must be represented. Now, this theme (which is not only that of the so-called avant-gardes but also that of ‘the jews’) is apparently not without resemblance to that of the ‘veiling unveiling’ in Heidegger and to that of anxiety. In all these cases, even if they are approached from very different routes, the same theme of ‘anesthesia’ is evident” (Lyotard, Heidegger and “the jews,” trans. Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 4).

423 Lyotard uses the quotes and non-capitalized letters in “the jews” to designate what they represent as a theme, as opposed to a concrete ethnic or religious group, akin to how The Differend encloses “Auschwitz” within quotes to designate its meaning that overflows a geographical location or history.
Language, for Heidegger, was mostly inextricable from Being. For Lyotard, language is integrally related to human beings insofar as meaning is continually determined in its use of and by humans. Engagement in language, let us call it our phrasing, is expressive of human activity: how we know, how we constitute reality and the self, how we behave. Phrasing is a phenomenologically-ontologized aesthetics: it is our activity of perception wherein this perception is not a matter of an all-powerful subject gathering information from an utterly passive, objective world. Perception is the process of a give and take engagement (phrasing) that yields (causes to occur, *ereignet*) representations (phrases) that are vivified with meaning determinable by use that governed by mutable rules. Yet, in our activity as human beings, we encounter, or are encountered by, things we perceive that exceed our capacity to constitute their representation. These things are the inexpressible: God, death, love, Auschwitz, etc.; they are the insoluble differends. These things have a reality that we really encounter, yet between the perception of these things and their representation is a disrupture of the process of phrasing.

What Lyotard discerns, however, in the philosophies of Kant and Adorno, that there is a forgetting of sensation that permits the sensation of a not-present presence, is a way that has been used to represent these things that we perceive that resist representation. He sees this path utilized, also, in avant-garde art, considerations of the holocaust, in anxiety, and Heidegger’s *lichtung*, that “veiling unveiling,” as he calls it, of *Ereignis*. In these, as in all texts he takes up, Lyotard hones in upon the movement that

---

gives rise to a feeling of contradiction as a designation of the theory’s lynchpin. This feeling reveals that this path is not a singular, linear projection of how to express the inexpressible (there is no one formula by which to construct that unfound idiom). Instead, to traverse it, one must enact several movements back and forth.

The first relay is that a concealment of perception, a mental stepping back, is necessary to be able to re-present perception’s raw data into a framework that can give it meaning. But, the creation of the representation requires the presentation’s presence. The second relay is that it is only in the moment of forgetting the immediacy, the rawness of perception, that the feeling of what cannot be presented is felt. To feel something is a presencing, but what is presenced here (felt) is what cannot be represented and what is not present (since its occurrence follows the forgetting of the presentation). How can we sense when sensation is suspended? It is an impossibility. It also grounds the final relay. This impossibility we feel, which prohibits its representation, prohibits its being known and expressed, nevertheless, must be expressed. Its impossibility issues us its command.

The concealment, the anesthesia or the forgetting of sensation, reveals the sensation that was perceived, yet cannot be represented, yet must be. This is only an expression of the thesis underlying his entire efforts within The Differend, yet, his revelation of these movements of contradiction, united under the theme of a reflection on the aesthetics of silence, reveal its viable solution. What must be expressed is what is shown to us and what we feel when all sensation is rendered absent. Eros, for Plato, is a

the call of Being to re-evaluate the tradition’s unthought thought. His etymology of Lichtung is en-lightened, but his translation avoids “light” or a derivative; instead, he cites open, airy, the clearing of Being, which mimic his “Nothing” in What is Metaphysics?, luminosity, and that place that has been cleared. His frequent translator, David Ferrell Krell, uses “shine forth” and “presence” (as a verb) to capture its occurrence from and within luminosity necessarily accompanied by concealment and requiring an openness of space (Krell, Intimations of Mortality: Time, Truth, and Finitude in Heidegger’s Thinking of Being (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), 80-94).
motivating lack. We are beckoned to express the having (of desire, as an agitation) of what we lack. We need to learn to feel an overfull nothing; we must learn an erotic listening to the unjust, the speaking of the palpable nothing, in order to know how to respond to it, which is how we are to express it.

What sound, then, does concealment make? What echoes from forgetting? Silence. Silence is a phrase (§§105, 110); phrases occur (p. xii, §104), thus, they are representations. The expression of the phrase of silence is the only representation to capture the immediacy of the perception being concealed, which is when the presence of that inexpressible is felt. Through *eros* and with silence, one can express the inexpressible.
4.4. Reading Lyotard on Eros to Read Pseudo-Dionysius on Eros

“Therefore the effort to arrive at the Truth, and especially the truth about the gods, is a longing for the divine.”
—Plutarch, Isis and Osiris.

Silence, as the last section argued, is the most viable option for a meaningful phrase to express the having of an absence—that concealment of sensation Lyotard described as the moment when the presence of the unpresentable was felt. This final section is going to give itself over to a closer consideration of aisthesis: this sensation that motivates the expression of silence to occur, this “matter given in form, which occasions taste and aesthetic pleasure” that must be forgotten to reveal “this contradictory feeling of a ‘presence’ that is certainly not present,” this sensation of eros. The initiatory endeavor will be an elaboration of two contradictory feelings of love that Lyotard engages in The Differend and then his posthumous writings on Augustine’s Confessions. The concluding endeavor of the synthesis of the two forms of love will be conducted as a spiritual exercise, a Lyotardian rereading, of Eros as a unique name of God in Pseudo-Dionysius’ The Divine Names, that solves the stutter of affirmation and denial, dissolves the differend, and initiates union with the divine.

Narratives are powerful means to unite and love may be the most powerful amongst all narratives. The Christian chronicle of love “vanquished the other narratives in Rome,” Lyotard argues, by dictating a “love of occurrence” into the narrative fabric of the growing community (§232). The love of occurrence owed its particular power to it

---


designating, precisely, both what is at stake in the genre of narrative itself (that a phrase always occurs) and what is at stake in its Christian instantiation (God’s commandment to love). In synthesis, the Christian narrative of love told its follows “To love what happens as if it were a gift, to love even the Is it happening? [Arrive-t-il, Ereignis, the occurrence] as the promise of good news, allows for linking onto whatever happens, including other narratives (and, subsequently, even other genres)” (§232). This narrative succeeds in precisely what the differend Auschwitz fails: to have its expression designate its originary cause and to cause the proliferation of flexible and productive, possible linkages.

Christian love reveals itself to be a consummate narrative as it proves capable of saying what cannot be said otherwise; it becomes an “antidote to the principle of exception that limits traditional narratives” (§232). The miyoi, the traditional myths of the native Cashinahua Indians, were granted their power by the strict denomination of who amongst them was included and constitutive of the history of the tribe (p. 152-4). In contrast, the Christian narrative does not found its own history by demarcating the included from the rejected; instead, it bids, “Love one another” (§232). The community is authorized as such by this “command of universal attraction” given through the “primordial story in which we learn that the god of love was not very well loved by his children and about the misfortunes that ensued” (§232). The narration of the origin of and command to love makes love an obligation, one that is universal, circular, and conditional: “if you are love, you ought to love; and you shall be loved only if you love” (§232).

The exceedingly powerful, universalizing logic of love that ensnares all creation seems to solve any and every differend by making any phrase that could occur linkable
by the command to love that which occurs as God’s gift. But, two stark clues erupted in Lyotard’s narration that suggest this narrative of love to be no solution for the witness. First, his conception of language, never laid out as a theory, yet demonstrated throughout the work, rejects its encapsulation in a closed system that could allow for an universal authority. “There is not yet one world, but some worlds (with various names and narratives)” (§235). Second, the universal, circular, and conditional logic of love too closely mimics that bind of Faurisson’s that opened the work and the investigation into differends. Love takes on an authority beyond even that of the tribunal; its logic becomes inescapable as its circularity entraps all, universally.

A singular authority over love, and love’s consequent restrictive operation, undermines the origin to which it first pointed and by which it received its power: the occurrence. Love united all events that had happened into a founding narrative of its tradition and could be projected onto those events not yet actual, thereby problematizing any possibility for the occurrence. Further, universal love becomes so systematically restrictive that it eliminates the role of responsibility one has to respond to the occurrence. This interpretation of love fails. The universalization that love engenders undermines itself and burns itself out. Its variations live on as “secular, universal history in the form of republican brotherhood, of communist solidarity,” but these variations cannot claim universal status and, thus, lack the capacity to unravel all differends (§235).

The first paradox is that which permits love to accomplish what no other narrative has been able to do, to undo differends, is also what undoes it. The second paradox is that, while, in *The Differend*, the Christian narrative of love fails, in Lyotard’s posthumously collected writings on Augustine’s *Confessions*, Christian love loses its
automatic totalization and is elaborated as an instrument of weakness as well as authority, thereby exponentially increasing its power.\textsuperscript{427} The two main textual differences: first, in \textit{The Differend}, Lyotard cites \textit{caritas}, while in his writings on the Saint, he cites \textit{eros}; second, the first exposition into love is brief and far more analytic in style, while, in the latter, Lyotard entangles nineteen fragmentary sections on Augustine’s yearning for God over fifty-seven pages of poeticism. Yet, there are two equally powerful consistencies: the persistence of love as a theme and how, throughout Lyotard’s \textit{oeuvre}, the form of the work speaks as profoundly as his prose.

Alain Badiou, in his consideration of Lyotard as a preeminent post-war thinker, likewise pauses at this persistence of love as a theme in Lyotard’s \textit{oeuvre}, which is otherwise linked through deep concerns about the inhumanity of the French-Algerian relations, minoritized populations, responses to war and atrocity, and events in art, speech, and life that conceptually suspend comprehension. Badiou comments, “he always give love an exceptional status, even when his political abnegation was at its most intense” and cites Lyotard, himself, commenting that “Nothing else, with the exception of love, seemed to us to be worth a moment’s attention during those years.”\textsuperscript{428} Love stands as the paramount example of optimism in the face of deflation and failure. In this way, a book uncovering the ferocity of Augustine’s desperate love for a remote lover is not unexpected amongst the concerns of his other, many titles.


The Confessions of Augustine is also remarkable like his earlier works in that its form is radically unique and reflective of Lyotard’s reading of the Saint. It is neither a penetrating textual analysis, like those interspersed throughout The Differend, nor is it a linear narrative, reflecting Augustine’s style of autobiographical chronicle. Its lack of analytic structure, however, has not left the work absent of all structure; instead, it finds its form by merging itself with the Confessions through ample margin notation indicating linkages to Augustine’s work. As The Confessions of Augustine repeats and alters fragments of quotations, weaving Augustine’s thoughts into Lyotard’s arguments and exposition, one wonders how much the work is a mirror, as Lyotard’s own attempt at autobiography.429 Both thinkers alternate between deeply personal, phenomenological writing and the detachment of the scholar and critic of narratives and both are profoundly seeking a way to express the inexpressible.

Lyotard begins his engagement with Augustine in a section entitled “Blazon.” Blazon is a prominent, vivid, or sensational display, whose archaic use designated a coat of arms or the action of inscribing something with one’s heraldic arms or name, as born from the Old French, blason, shield. Pseudo-Dionysius likewise begins his treatise by considering the importance and difficulty of discerning the names of through their imprint upon all of creation. Lyotard quotes Augustine’s Confessions, Book X:

Thou calledst and criest aloud to me; thou even breakest open my deafness: thou shinest thine beams upon me, and hath put my blindness to

429 Two reviews also note the work’s authorial ambiguity: “So the book is essentially an early draft. But a draft of what? This is no orderly commentary, but a personal reflection, wherein L. has returned to his phenomenological concerns, in a lyrical discourse mixed with Augustine’s, with God the addressee of both” (J. Kevin Coyle, “The Confession of Augustine (book review),” Theological Studies (June 2002)) and “This book is a meditation that takes places not on the text of Augustine’s Confessions but from within it, blurring the distinctions between Augustine’s voice and Lyotard’s (Graham Ward, “The Confession of Augustine (review),” Biography 24, 4 (2001): 942-43, 942). Ward also notes their synchronicity on eros: “In line with another early preoccupation—desire as a disruptive force—L., favors the imagery of the ‘spiritual eroticism’ he perceives to be a main motif of the Confessions” (Ibid., 943).
flight: thou didst most fragrantly blow upon me, and I drew in my breath
and I pant after thee; I tasted thee, and now do hunger and thirst after thee;
thou didst touch me, and I even burn again to enjoy thy peace (1).430

Blazoned across these lines is Augustine’s erotic desire, fed by sensation rather than
reason, to know, name, and return to union with the Thou.431 But there is an undeniable
paradox to this desire. God may call to us and we may long for Him, but, as Pseudo-
Dionysius asks, “If God cannot be grasped by mind or sense-perception, if he is not a
particular being, how do we know him?” (869C) and, if we cannot know Him, “How then
can we speak of the divine names” (593A) and respond to Him?

There is an incomprehensible obstacle, according to Lyotard, in the instance of
the addressor in the phrase universe (§25). How can I love You, Augustine demands, if I
cannot know You, God? Pseudo-Dionysius responds, it is true that God is “invisible and
incomprehensible,” and “‘unsearchable and inscrutable,’ since there is not a trace for
anyone who would reach through into the hidden depths of this infinity,” but He is also
“not absolutely incommunicable to everything” (588C). Therefore, “We now grasp these
things in the best way we can, and as they come to us, wrapped in the sacred veils …”

430 Lyotard quotes Augustine, Confessions (two volumes), trans. William Watts, Loeb Classical Library,

431 Augustine’s religious desire is fed by the passions rather than reason (cf., the concluding remarks of
chapter one, section six, chapter three, section one, and chapter four, section two, above, for further
argumentation concerning the differentiation of passions from reason), which seems ironic given that
Augustine’s search for God most literally consists of his repeated demands to know God. The current
expression of Augustine’s sensuous desire is constructed by Lyotard so as to emphasize the sensuality and
illuminate this irony. Yet, Lyotard only pedagogically amplifies the undertones already in Augustine and
initially discussed in chapter three, section two e, above, in order to show the duality of Augustine’s search
for God through faith and through reason and how it is in the sensuous that his faith is given truthful
credence. In the passionate suffering, Augustine can begin to grasp the metaphoric and “understand” and
respond to the highly physical and sensory account of God: He called, cried, broke open deafness, shined
light against blindness, was fragrant against not-smelling, taste, thirst, touch, etc. His account of his
awareness of God is entirely tied to the inner and exterior senses of the mind and body. He says his love
for God was fueled in this way; fueled by what he can capture and express passionately, not rationally.
God is intelligibly unknowable, but we ‘know’ (love) Him how we can, which is through the sensory. This
openness to passionate, rather than narrowly rational knowledge, applies equally to Lyotard and Pseudo-
Dionysius, as well.
(592B). His truth does not come to us clear and evident truth, as it appears to the
divinized minds of angels, but it comes how it can in accordance with the capacity of our
minds that are divinely embedded in our bodies. Augustine captures this, according to
Lyotard’s reading, “Whenas I love my God, I love a certain kind of light, and a kind of
voice, and a kind of fragrance, and a kind of meat, and a kind of embrace—embrace,
taste, fragrancy, voice and light which are of the inner human in me …” (5). Our flesh,
“the most repugnant and the sweetest Christian mystery,” that was created in His image,
cannot be forgotten when we ask how we may know Him (4).432 The way Augustine and
Pseudo-Dionysius know God, love God, is not through a rational deduction of absolutes;
instead, the Absolute is woven into a tale of love and calls us, first and most powerfully,
by love, by the sensual, though the flesh: “It invites a fairy-story, a fable, not a discourse”
(6). The witness feels God; he does not know God.

When we read the names of God through His creations, “Since the unknowing of
what is beyond being is something above and beyond speech, mind, or being itself”
(588A), when we know that God is “nameless and yet has the names of everything that
is” (596C), we know that God is Light, Beautiful, Zeal (693A), Greatness and Smallness,
Immovable and Moved (909B), we know, then, that “one should ascribe to it an
understanding beyond being” (588A). Because “He is power insofar as he exceeds all
power,” He must be the names beyond all names, all names at once and none of them at
all (889D). The names we use must capture the paradox that God is and is not what we

432 The flesh is also how God called us though His son and how the latter (and latter priests) reveal the truth
of the Father to us through the transformation of the sweet wine and dry cracker into the blood and body: a
transformation made “without the concept, next to the flesh, in a convulsion” (4). The Eucharist, Lyotard
writes, defies any juridical logic: “This spasm is the sole witness to grace. It cannot be submitted as
evidence to the tribunal of ideas, which declines comment: confession does not come under its jurisdiction”
(4). No matter how capable flesh is to sully the spirit, grace is demonstrated with and through it and it is by
the flesh and not mind, that we may know the inexpressible.
can have knowledge of; God, like desire, is that motivating force of lack that vivifies us, that, while to have it, we cannot have anything at all.

Lyotard makes Augustine’s eroticism for God apparent by weaving together run-on sentences paratactically composed of the most profoundly sensationalist words within Augustine’s autobiography: “groan,” “moan,” “force entrance,” “the lover excites the five mouths of the woman,” “he protests,” “it piercest,” “thou strokedst us,” “victorious,” “you took him as a woman,” “cut him through,” “turned him inside out,” “forced five times,” “violated in its five senses” (2-3). He ensures that we feel the excess of the confession and that we see the hint of accusation, “apologized,” “accused,” “never being on time,” as if from a jealous lover, towards God: “… you left me by the wayside, why did you abandon me” (1)? It is impossible not to read Lyotard’s Augustine’s Confessions as a lover’s diary and more impossible to read the love as anything other than eros.

Pseudo-Dionysius’ The Divine Names is also an ode of love. As it is a letter written to a colleague, it includes and encourages prayer, which precisely is a reflection on one’s love for God. As it is a treatise, his reflection on God underpins the progress of his argument: God is Good, the Good is Beautiful, and we love the Good and Beautiful that is God, thus, our love motivates us to name Him.433 “All things long for it. The intelligent and rational long for it by way of knowledge, the lower strata by way of perception, the remainder by way of the stirrings of being alive and in whatever fashion befits their condition” (593D). The motivation to name God, born from desire, guides his philosophical style of transcribing what fragments we come to know of Him into recollection to dwell on, to use, to feel closer to Him. God’s creation, as procession, was a differentiation of Himself into all things; reversion, achieved through dwelling on the

433 “… the Beautiful is therefore the same as the Good” (704B).
source, returns all things to identity, to the “innate togetherness of everything…. the intermingling of everything” (704C). Therefore, we seek as many of these fragments as we can acquire from Scripture and sensory observation of all His creation, yet their nature keeps our meager knowledge more of a stutter than a narrative.434

According to both etymology and experience, beauty calls to us; God’s goodness is a gift as is beauty. When we seek names of His creation to apply reverently to Him, those things that are beautiful call our attention more readily. Pseudo-Dionysius and latter thinkers are compelled to provide more argument for the less glorious names applied to God than to the name Beauty, itself. All beauty is from and powerfully points to the eternal Beauty that is God. It impels us to seek that Beauty, as Augustine desperately implored, “Oh where, where, shall I find you, my truly good, my certain loveliness?”435 This power of beauty makes it stand out as a name in The Divine Names. While Pseudo-Dionysius repeatedly delineates hierarchies—God’s names, the capacities of His creation and, in other treatises, the ranks of angels and religious figures—his arguments for unity purport that all created things long for God and participate in Beauty, even those things that are not: “And I would even be so bold as to claim that nonbeing also shares in the Beautiful and the Good, because nonbeing, when applied transcendentally to God in the sense of a denial of all things, is itself beautiful and good”

434 The fragments compounded lend speech a staccato that becomes a stutter of repetition and difference through his methodology of the affirmation and negation of names. A productive illustration could be borrowed from Johannes’ obsession with the green cloak as the material symbol of what he knows, in the beginning, about Cordelia in Kierkegaard’s “Seducer’s Diary” (cf., Either/Or, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 301 ff.).

The unifying power of Beauty renders it, however paradoxically, the first name that suggests a distinction, perhaps even a hierarchy, in the names for God. The Divine Names is clearly an ode of love; the name Beauty inspires us to desire God by the behavior of a lover. The character of its love seems virtuous, while Lyotard’s portrayal of Augustine’s seems bawdy. The acute erotic force of Pseudo-Dionysius’ work is not clear until this love is revealed to be that which captivates us to found the name of Beauty, Kallos, and violently arouses us to found the divine name Yearning, Eros. Beauty is so powerful that even what is not is drawn in by it. Beauty is so powerful that we do not merely know it to be a name we give to God, because He created it, but it is a name whereby we feel God. We feel drawn to Him by bodily sensation distinct from how the sensation of sight prompts our cognitive reflection to call Him Light or Rock. Yet, Beauty is most powerful because it awakens desire, even in God.

Beauty is so powerful in its call and founds so extreme a response by desire to embrace it, even the Creator Himself falls prey to its charms: “And we may be so bold as to claim also that the Cause of all things loves all things in the superabundance of his

---

436 Pseudo-Dionysius claims that Good is “the most important name” for God when elaborating it as his starting point (because it “shows forth all the processions of God” (680B) and is the name “the sacred writers have preeminently set apart for the supra-divine God from all other names” (693B)), but, I would argue against the absolutism of this claim of importance because, first, he does not describe it as necessitating reciprocity, as in Beauty and Yearning, and, second, that the lack of a strong Neoplatonic distinction between Good and Beauty may nullify the argument that Pseudo-Dionysius intends a fixed, substantial difference (like Proclus, he argues, begin with the “superior of what is good” (680B)).

437 Heidegger alludes to an argument to be made concerning Augustine’s unique promotion of the role of sight, “Above all, it was Augustine who noted the remarkable priority of ‘seeing’ in conjunction with his interpretation of concupiscientia. Ad oculos enim videre proprie pertinet, seeing truly belongs to the eyes. Utimur autem hoc verbo etiam in ceteris sensibus cum eos ad cognoscendum intendimus [yet we apply this word to the other senses also, when we exercise them in the search after knowledge]” (Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), I, v, §36, p.171; Latin translation, my own). However, I want to highlight the difference between what the sight, crucial to the perception of beauty, leads to: either understanding or to a knowing-feeling much like the sensation that Kristeva argued Proust’s writings to capture (cf., chapter two of the present work).
goodness…” (708A). Beauty’s inspiration of desire reveals God’s yearning to be radically circular: His yearning created us; made from His yearning, His creation yearns for Him; yet, His creation, too, makes Him yearns for His creation, “and so it is that all things must desire, must yearn for, must love, the Beautiful and the Good,” even the Beautiful and Good, Himself (708A). Beauty beckons God’s yearning to beckon to us to beckon to Him. God’s superabundant yearning, that inspires all yearning, grants him the divine name Eros.

Pseudo-Dionysius’ anticipation of the degree to which this revelation will shock us is revealed doubly. First, with the repetition of the phrase “we may be so bold” (708A) to acknowledge His eros, and, second, with his cautious offer of the very first apology within his consistently challenging treatise: “Let no one imagine that in giving status to the term ‘yearning’ I am running counter to scripture” (708B). His “boldness” asserted that both the nothing and God are called to desire by beauty (704B, 708B). Is this repeated phrase coy or a hesitant affirmation? Can it be bold if it is true that it does not run counter to Scripture? Further ambiguity lurks in his apology as it acknowledges his “giving status” to the scandalous name as he denies its scandal. If no scandal, then why an apology? He attempts to deny its scandal by trying to erase the difference between the love we presumed he was speaking of when he told us all things long for the One—agape, in the Scriptures, from the love we condemn as turning us from Him to sin—eros, in the Scriptures. How can his use of the opposite term in the Scriptures not

438 “He is, as it were, beguiled by goodness, by love, and by yearning and is enticed away from his transcendent dwelling place and comes to abide within all things…” (712A-B).

439 Riordan, while perhaps too strongly suggesting succession in love following knowledge, nevertheless, he succinctly captures the circular feel of love’s reciprocity while highlighting the radical role reversal: “The act of loving, which follows upon the act of knowing, moves in a reverse order: the beloved draws the lover toward itself” (William Riordan, Divine Light: The Theology of Denys the Areopagite (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 199).
run counter to the Scriptures? Finally, if there is no scandal here, why does he not erase this difference of terms by using both terms as names for God? Instead, his employment of the solitary form of love, *eros*, and his singular instance of the breakage of his own technique of the conjunction of affirmation and negation—he never negates the name Yearning, emphatically emphasizes the very distinction of the name.

When Lyotard begins *The Differend* with the guiding example of Faurisson’s denial of Auschwitz’s gas chambers, he does not dismiss him, as he easily could, by showing its motivation to be hate-led denial or by undoing the simple logical bind by showing it to confuse premises from two conflicting phrase regimens. Instead, Lyotard engages the argument on its own terms and with a spirit of impressive philosophical honesty. Lyotard treats Faurisson much like many of the young men in Plato’s dialogues engage Socrates, except that Lyotard does not flee when his attempts to work within the other’s logical framework keep failing. In this spirit, then, and lacking an unarguable answer with which to begin, let us ask why does Pseudo-Dionysius use the term *eros*, instead of *agape*, as the conspicuous, suggestively crucial name for God? If they are truly one and the same, then why bother employing the term that he must justify and risk, if his justifications are rejected, having his work censored?

Sometimes a little scandal helps a book’s notoriety, but this fails to be a persuasive explanation for Pseudo-Dionysius because his entire treatise already employs an innovative, shocking conjunction of apophatic and cataphatic theologies. Instead, it further problematizes the genuineness of his claim that *eros* is not a remarkable innovation and, thus, potential for scandal. There are four major implications of *eros* that challenge its suitability as a name and descriptor for God’s love: *eros* carries an implicit
suggestion of sexuality; intimate to its sexual connotation, *eros* is inseparable from the physical or material; *eros*, classically, has been defined as a lack; and, finally, *eros*, classically, has been the source for deviancy from the good. If *eros* is to be neither scandalous nor even contrary to the spirit of love designated in the Scriptures, then these four factors must be addressed. Pseudo-Dionysius quotes and references many Biblical passages to support his case that *Eros* is a legitimate name for God. Many of the passages, however, constitute weak evidence; either they invoke a love closer to *agape* than to *eros* or they cite *eros* in a relation very distinct from that proper for God and humanity. It may be most productive to explore only the strongest of his evidence.

*Eros* is laden with connotations of sexuality in opposition to the spiritual love implied by the Scripture’s frequent term, *agape*. Instead of approaching his attempted erasure of scandal by arguing *eros* to be chaste, Pseudo-Dionysius successfully amplifies the name’s sexuality by quoting Samuel 1:26: “Love for you came on me like love for women” (709C). Classically, chaste love is envisioned as a mother’s love for her child; erotic love as a man’s love for a woman. Pseudo-Dionysius is describing humanity’s love for God, and God’s love for humanity, within the latter idiom: love awakened and fed by the physical beauty of the other and driven to seek its consummation in the pleasure of union. He obfuscates this blunt pronouncement,

---

440 Pseudo-Dionysius’ key evidence is his quote of Proverbs 4:6-8: “Yearn for her and she shall keep you; exalt her and she will extol you; honor her and she will embrace you” (708C); however, the “her” signified in Proverbs is revealed in lines just before: “Get wisdom, get understanding …” and “Wisdom is the principle thing” (Proverbs 4:5, 7). He also quotes 2 Samuel 1:26: “I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.” This passage may be love less chaste than that for wisdom, but the love of a comrade still lacks the sexual impulse that could offer Pseudo-Dionysius true support.

441 Luibheid’s translation includes the delicate note “This text is not exactly that of the Septuagint” (Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, Op. Cit., p. 81, n. 155). In a notable parallel, Lyotard excises this same verse for comment from Augustine’s *Confessions*, rewriting it, as well, as “you took him as a woman,” which even more dramatically emphasizes its sexual tone (3).
however, by adding the chastisement that, “to those listening properly to the divine things the name ‘love’ is used by the sacred writers in divine revelation with the exact same meaning as the term ‘yearning’” (709C). This chastisement more clearly argues that the Scriptures recognizes the eroticism of the divine relation than it argues that his reading is nothing different than the common Scriptural chaste love, and thus, nothing scandalous.442

The materiality of eros is a second essential argument against its use in the Scriptures. The attribution of bodily sensation spawned from the perception of the beauty of the body to He who is not material poses a contradiction.443 Yet, again, Pseudo-Dionysius’ Scriptural quotation, from the Song of Songs 8:2, emphasizes the materiality of eros, rather than erasing it: “I yearned for her beauty” (709B). The Song is his best evidence of a Scriptural precedent for a sexualized, physical love. Its attention to the material surpasses notable examples in the histories of both monotheistic writings and erotic poetry.444 The male lover in the Song audibly engages a physical revelry of his beloved’s beauty that moves from an exclamation, “How beautiful your sandaled feet,”

442 Is Pseudo-Dionysius implying that if we do not understand agape and eros to be one, we simply are not listening properly or, perhaps worse, we have not been graced with initiation into the divine wisdom (cf. divine knowledge requires initiation (597C); God’s meaning is “hidden” for all but the initiated (640D)).

443 Albeit, a weak contradiction that has been undone by many accounts. For example, Jean-Luc Nancy writes, “… nothing and no one is untouchable in Christianity, since even the body of God is given to be eaten and drunk” and “… Christianity will have been the invention of the religion of touch, of the sensible, of presence that is immediate to the body and to the heart” (Nancy, Noli me tangere: On the Raising of the Body, trans. Sarah Clift, Pascale-Anne Brault, and Michael Naas (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 14).

444 Paradoxically, religious eroticism tends to describe the ineffable, more than the physical, whereas asceticism focuses on the material, so as to delineate what one must avoid. Yet, still, asceticism’s tendency to fetishism (the meaning of the material becomes symbol) is distinct from its sexualization. Most erotic poetry mimics religious eroticism; when it does not, it leans to asceticism by rendering material sexuality into a means of social control and/or commentary (cf., “Men’s sex-urge is less primitive, less raw, / Our lust is bound by the limits of the law. / But for women …,” Ovid, The Art of Love, trans. James Michie (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 21).
up her body, noting that her “graceful legs are like jewels, the work of a craftsman’s hands. Your navel is a rounded goblet that never lacks blended wine. Your waist is a mound of wheat encircled by lilies. Your breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. Your neck is like an ivory tower,” indulging further lines on her face and hair, before culminating in a reflection on what her physical beauty compels him to: “I will climb the palm tree; I will take hold of its fruit.”445 Her beauty spawns his desire, which drives him to seek unity with her parallel to Pseudo-Dionysius’ invocation of the movement of beauty and desire between God and His creations.

In his emphasis of the materiality of eros in the Song of Songs, Pseudo-Dionysius uncovers an unarticulated argument for the greater appropriateness of eros than agape to name God. The Song shows the beauty of the beloved’s body to be the very same as the material beauty of God’s other creations: goblets and wine, wheat and lilies, fawns and towers and palms. The imagery of the Song is thoroughly sexual, dwelling on physical beauty and the tortuous pursuit of love’s consummation, but its materiality also points beyond itself to all of creation in a manner agape could not have captured. This mimics the overflowing of procession that elucidates how all of creation points to their cause, which underpins Pseudo-Dionysius’ method of discerning God’s names. The Song and Pseudo-Dionysius both affirm that all that is beautiful, ultimately, is the eternal Beauty; all desire for the beauty here is desire for the eternal Beauty.

445 Song of Songs 7:1-9. Walsh, commenting on the unity of the Song within the Bible, expresses an insight equally pertinent to its relevancy to Pseudo-Dionysius: “The God of the Bible is a God no one gets to see, so the search and struggle during a prolonged and painful absence by the loved other [in the Song] is, in a very real sense, the theme of the Bible. Belief in an unseen God, amid a life full of joys and sorrows, is about the human experience of wanting without consummation” (Carey Ellen Walsh, Exquisite Desire: Religion, the Erotic, and the Song of Songs (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 32).
Beauty ignites the intensity of desire that mightily “bestirs the world and holds all things in existence by the longing inside them to have beauty” (704A). Beauty’s call commits us to responding to the other as “a model” who inspires us “conform” to his or her beauty (704B) in a manner illustrative of Lyotard’s contrast of model, which seeks engagement, to example, which is indifferent (§152). Beauty’s call inspires us to give ourselves up to the other; “This divine yearning brings ecstasy so that the lover belongs not to self but to the beloved” (712A). It inspires the aim of humanity, “there it is ahead of all as Goal, as the Beloved, as the Cause toward which all things move” (704B), as it inspires the endeavor of mystical theology, the desire for communion of the lover with the beloved, expressed in Song 7:10-1: “I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me. Come, my lover, let us go to the countryside, let us spend the night in the villages.” Communion is the completion and consummation of emanation as the reversion to our originary source: all is from Beauty and all “return upward” to Beauty (704B).446

If eros has been shunned from designating God’s love because of its classical definition as a lack, which would contradict His superabundance, its preceding revelation as an aim and a motivating force has already forged the counterargument. The lover desires his beloved because he does not possess her; how could he? Desire’s satisfaction is only in its sustenance, its maintenance as a lack; it cannot be possessed. God exceeds our capacity in every way to capture Him. This impossibility is at the heart of Pseudo-Dionysius’ invocation of the imagery of God as overflowing and Lyotard’s description of

---

446 This sense of communion concurs with Georges Bataille’s central premises and definition of eroticism: “Eroticism cannot be discussed unless man too is discussed in the process. In particular, it cannot be discussed independently of the history of religions,” which rests upon the definition of eroticism as a longing for continuity; continuity that is systematically pursued beyond this world is his definition for religion (Bataille, *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1957, 1986), 8 ff). Further congruity between Bataille and Pseudo-Dionysius is their differentiation of *agape* and *eros* intoning that between stillness and agitation; love can be declared and rested within contentedly whereas desire agitates and impels us to action. Cf., section two of this chapter for more.
any event’s evasion of its singular encapsulation. Pseudo-Dionysius names the One as the “mind beyond mind, word beyond speech,” which designates the contradictory having and lacking that must be thought in order to think *eros* (588B). In addition to the spatial disruption of something and nothing, conceptions of both *eros* and God must also suspend the linearity we impose into time. Pseudo-Dionysius writes, “Here is the source of all which transcends every source, here is an ending which transcends completion” (708A). Divine union cannot be a final event and obliterate faith in the Other, just as *eros*’ consummation cannot end desire for pleasure; instead, God and *eros* must both function according to Pseudo-Dionysius’ formula as the site that evades situation and the satisfaction beyond conclusion.

The final, dominant qualm concerning *Eros* as a name of God is fed by the term’s classical representation as the source for all deviancies from the good. The origin may be found in Plato’s representation of *eros* as the base part of the soul that, like a wild horse, constantly pulls us to acquisition and away from harmony. The clearest linkage of this assault upon harmony to sin is made by Augustine:

… the reign of lust rages tyrannically and distracts the life and whole spirit of man with many conflicting storms of terror, desire, anxiety, empty and false happiness, torture because of the loss of something that he used to love, eagerness to possess what he does not have, grievances for injuries received, and fires of vengeance.

According to the Saint, the reign of lust distracts us from the truth of faithful life and our faith in the truth granted by God. However, the “storms” born from this reign of lust mimic the emotional and spiritual ill-ease, described by his *Confessions*, that was born

---


out of his pursuit of faith and knowledge of the truth of God. While in his *On Free Choice of the Will*, Augustine defines *libido* as sin, as a turning away from the eternal to the temporal, in obedience to Lyotard’s persuasive reading of his *Confessions* and Pseudo-Dionysius’ employment in *The Divine Names*, we must define *eros* as that intense drive to pleasure without cessation, as an intensity turning us towards the eternal.\(^{449}\) It is nonsensical, then, to name a reverent turning towards the divine as sin.

If the four dominant arguments rejecting *Eros* from the legitimate designation of God, themselves, are rejected, the only remaining question is to fill the clearing in the argument with an affirmation of why Pseudo-Dionysius would name God Yearning. Let us “be so bold” (704B, 708B) so as to suggest that *Eros* best captures the spirit of excess that Pseudo-Dionysius must attribute to God’s love because God exceeds all that we can fathom. Chaste love is a love without the physical; it definition gives it limits. To confine God’s love to a chaste interpretation would be to deny His love from a possible expression. This denial would be an imposition of an impossible limit on He who exceeds all limits. *Eros*, unlike *agape*, resonates with the transgression of limits.\(^{450}\)


\(^{450}\) Most notably, *eros* transgresses the limits of logic. For Lyotard, the libidinal is the superior force of disruption of linearity (*cf.* Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans, Iain Hamilton Grant (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993). Linearity entraps us in a thinking that forces us to silence because within it, we can never express the differend captured by Lyotard’s Auschwitz and Pseudo-Dionysius’ God. *Eros*, like the first moment of Kant’s sublime, can make us gasp and open the space of interruption; Pseudo-Dionysius captures this in his instruction: “we call a halt to the activities of our minds … we approach the ray which transcends being. Here, in a manner no words can describe, preexisted all the goals of all knowledge … that neither intelligence nor speech can lay hold of … it surpasses everything and is wholly beyond our capacity to know it” (592D). *Eros’* interruption and opening a productive space of silence permits us to transgress impossibility. But transgression requires limits to transgress. Silence and *eros*, in order to be, risk their own destruction: silence can only be heard in contrast to noise and *eros* seeks consummation in having its lack. But, since silence is a phrase and divine union does not destroy faith, the transgression of their limits yields an impossible affirmation instead of finality. Bataille captures this spirit in his seminal work, arguing, “Eroticism, it may be said, is assenting to life up to the point of death” (Bataille, *Eroticism*, Op. Cit., 11). An affirmation of life beyond the risk of death also defines faith in Pseudo-Dionysius’ mysticism; this, again, is captured by Bataille: “the erotic moment is also the most intense of all (except perhaps for mystical experience); hence its place is at the loftiest peak of man’s spirit”
necessity of naming God must be the methodological permission for any name to be transgressed by He who transgresses every understanding and all bounds of thought. God’s yearning is superlatively powerful. Its power is identified as the very cause of His creative act and one so strong that it even draws Him to us. Eros’ excess, existanai phrenon, drives us out of our minds, and into the most powerful union with the beloved: “This divine yearning brings ecstasy so that the lover belongs not to self but to the beloved” (712A). Eros best captures He who cannot be captured and our relationship with Him.

We are driven by beauty to a most passionate desire that drives us outside of ourselves to union with God, but what is it that bears witness to this inexpressible? It is not truly the Scriptures, for Pseudo-Dionysius, but the body as the site of sensation: it sees beauty and gives itself over to desire. It is not truly any proper testimony by the witness, for Lyotard, but our persistent attempt in the face of failure to find the unknown idiom. According to Lyotard, it is not the memory, for Augustine, that bears witness to...

(Ibid., 273). Or, for Pseudo-Dionysius, the affirmation finds its encouragement in that “we shall be united with him and, our understanding carried away, blessedly happy, we shall be struck by his blazing light” (592C). The only question that truly remains is whether, in the disruption that risks the rupture of common communication, can silence and eros successfully rupture only the linearity that prohibits thought of the unthinkable without erasing all other possibilities of expression?

451 “And love is defined as essentially ‘ecstatic’, that is: the one who loves is drawn out of himself and centres his being on the object of his love. Love is ecstatic, because it is unitive: the lover is united to the beloved, who is, for him, a manifestation of beauty” (Andrew Louth, Denys the Areopagite (London: Continuum, 1989), 94).

452 The reciprocity of eros between God and humanity does not imply equalization or permit ecstasy to diminish the lover. Our ecstasy can bring union with God, but never make us God; God’s union with us never dilutes His omnipotence or transcendence, which would be His destruction and make yearning evil, and not His creation: His yearning is only goodness, as is ours. When He gives Himself to us, “… he does so by virtue of his supernatural and ecstatic capacity to remain, nevertheless, within himself (712A-B). Further, God is the “superabundance of delights unfathomable to the mind…. He is beyond being itself. Quite simply, as ‘drunk’ God stands outside of all good things, being the superfullness of all these things” (Pseudo-Dionysius, “Letter Nine: To Titus the hierarch,” in Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works, Op. Cit., 1112B-C; “inebriated” cites the Song 5:1). The reciprocity is captured in its conclusion: God must sleep due to the “mixing of wine and the hangover of God after his inebriation …” (Ibid., 1113C).
the inexpressible, but the “inner human” (7-8). He arrives at this conclusion by understanding the Other, that is Augustine’s addressee, as the *interior intimo meo*, *superior summo meo*, as the other more intimate to me than I was to myself, as the other more superior to me than I was to myself, as the Other who was within as I was outside. The inner human is the site for sensation, he who feels God instead of trying to find Him and define Him. There is no concept of the inexpressible in Pseudo-Dionysius’ naming of God or memory that could be fetched from Augustine’s storehouse and proffered by Lyotard’s witness before the tribunal. The witness is the “inner human,” the embodied *aisthesis* of *eros* who speaks from within so only silence is heard without.

*Aisthesis*, according to Lyotard’s definition, is the sensation that motivates, through its own erasure-as-revelation, its expression in silence. This final section has explored *aisthesis* as *eros*. *Eros* speaks most eloquently to each of Lyotard’s requirements. It is a sensation that is, by nature, intentional; it points towards that which caused it: it points to the object of its desire. Its intentionality motivates it most intensely; its attainment of its object, logically, would be its own destruction. But desire must erase this risk of its own self-annihilation in order to *be* desire. This precarious,

453 The “inner human” does not need to remain an elusive denomination; it may be understood to be the same as the “inner self” that is identified as that which merges with God in divine union, for example, Aquinas’ definition of mysticism as the *cognitio dei experimentalis*, the knowledge of God through experience, that Gershom Scholem explains as “the fundamental experience of the inner self withi enters into immediate contact with God or metaphysical Reality” (Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schoken Books, 1974), 4).

454 “*Interior intimo meo ... superior summo meo*” (cf., *Confessions*, bk. III, ch. 6) and “You were within, but I was outside …” (*Confessions*, bk. X, ch. 27). Cf., Eugene TeSelle, “Review,” *The Journal of Religion* 83, 3 (July 2003): 458-60, 460, especially, “the You to whom confession is addressed is the heteronomous Other, a feature of the Jewish tradition that so repelled and fascinated Lyotard” (*Ibid.*, 459).
contradictory nature feels “a ‘presence’ that is certainly not present.” This feeling is a bumping up against a limit of thought and expression.

The Christian narrative of love as agape, as Lyotard revealed, can celebrate this limit, radically unify parties with disparate definitions through it, and overcome all differends. But, it, too, falls prey to the totalizing impulse of logic and undoes its own power. The power of love can only be maintained so long as love can maintain its inner contradiction. This love that succeeds is eros. Lyotard’s rereading of Augustine’s Confessions uncovers the possibility of reading God’s love and our love for God as eros. This rereading becomes a model, a spiritual exercise, demonstrating this possibility through Pseudo-Dionysius’ The Divine Names. Eros, then, is demonstrated as the sensation whose forgetting permits the not-present presence to appear. Eros bears witness to the inexpressible, which is then permitted its expression in silence, be that inexpressible Auschwitz, God, or a differend undetermined here.

If one retains the restrictive, and self-violating, logic of Faurisson, one will argue that, still, the tribunal cannot understand the phrase of silence given meaning by the sensation and its forgetting of eros and, thus, this final solution is still one that fails. But, this critique simply keeps alive the necessity of reflection and rereading all questions. The Nazis employed the euphemism “Endlösung der Judenfrage,” the Final Solution of the Jewish Question, to name to complete termination of the Jewish people in death camps. Mass murder was their attempt at a response to their intolerant question. The


employment of such an expression, that someone is a “question” to be solved, happens frequently but only by suspension of the reflection upon its shift between phrase regimes. We need to be reminded of the importance of reflection when confronted with this expression and its dubious linkage between language games. It is our obligation to the occurrence of the phrase. Not only because it made so many think that they could think mass extermination, but also because this expression bolsters a common interpretation of humanistic ethics, the other is a question who calls to me, and a common interpretation of deontological ethics, it is my duty to interpret my actions and their logic according to their effect upon the other. To make the other a question that can be solved can guide us to phrases in entirely opposing linkages. To turn to extermination and its justification, the addressor must suspend the possibility of the ethical linkages. One logic of suspension was seen in Faurisson’s adoption of (however perverted) phenomenological and scientific phrase regimes: ethics is empathy and soft thinking and taints objective inquiry into the gas chambers. But Faurisson suspends his own, human acuity in the name of a deceptive objectivity parallel to the Nazi suspension of the humanity of the Jews in their solution to the Judenfrage. Ethics, too often, also suspends the most extreme cases of extermination because the extreme skews statistical probabilities or, as Lyotard expresses, the singular event overflows its possible encapsulation. But, as Lyotard shows us by becoming our model, we must work up against these events in an attempt to work through them in the face of their conceptually impossible encapsulation. It is our obligation to reread events even with the knowledge that our attempts will fail. And, he shows us that all final solutions fail. For this, we can be thankful.
Conclusion

The Expression of the Inexpressible

To declare an expression inexpressible is to make a logical judgment about the validity of the possibility of its expression. To express the inexpressible violates logic’s command about the bounds of meaning. Nevertheless, the expression is possible and is meaningful even if it remains outside of the permissions of the tribunals of logic. This dissertation, through the aide of Jean-François Lyotard’s witness to the gas chambers and Pseudo-Dionysius’ faithful witness to God, has demonstrated the multiplicity of ways to satisfy the universal command and desire to express that which resists its expression. The inexpressible is an event that overflows itself in such a way that it washes away the normal constructs we would use to grasp it and conceptualize it into a narrative expression.

The foil in Lyotard’s *The Differend* is the Holocaust survivor who is confronted by a logical bind from historical revisionists: while she lives, she cannot testify to her internment at a death camp. The survivor is silenced; damned if she testifies to a logical impossibility and damned if she does not, remains silent, and gives no testimony. Being forced into silence provokes in her a nausea of awareness of the endless possible phrasings, the infinity of linkages her sentences could make, but do not, before the tribunal. Lyotard takes up this logical bind to see how it was tied and how to undo it,
instead of dismissing it as hate speech that says nothing. Engaging it, he eventually unravels its logic within its own logical framework: it violates its own presumptions about the validity of communicating across phrase regimens. But, Lyotard does not grant the survivor’s testimony redemption because he reveals the power of the revisionist’s logic to be founded in its pointing beyond itself to the truly insurmountable differend of “Auschwitz.”

Pseudo-Dionysius’ witness is the religious faithful who is called to testify to what he cannot: knowledge of God. Yet, his faith commands him to bear witness and give testimony, however impossible this act of faith may be. God exceeds what we can know of Him, even as we are called to praise Him. Theology, traditionally, responds by naming Him in the face of uncertain knowledge or remaining silent to honor His unknowability. But, Pseudo-Dionysius re-engages the logical bind; instead of choosing one means of response or the other, he synthesizes the impossible into an expression truly worthy to express the inexpressible. He names and un-names God all that we know and could know and do not know of Him. His most honest and all-encompassing expression does not abide logic, but redefines the possibilities for meaningful expressions.

The inexpressible upsets our perceptual and rational exercises and confounds our tongues. Its pure, immediate expression is impossible but our stammering and trembling before the abyss of meaning does give us a clue to its most productive expression. Reason commands us, be it by a tribunal of law or faith or out of living a philosophical life, to reformulate the expression to seek its comprehension by analyzing its components, establishing the hierarchy of its aspects, and discerning its instruction. Reason’s path forever frustrates us, as its object is essentially elusive. Yet, this
impossible path is a fulfillment of its command; the mental work of reason is the exercise of the act of faith and philosophy. Lyotard and Pseudo-Dionysius are heterogeneous thinkers who engage two sides of an identical problem in methods remarkably similar for their radical embraces and rigorous working through of absurdity. Both thinkers approach the impossible, acknowledge its call, and honorably commit to its engagement. They, themselves, become models of what flourished throughout ancient and medieval philosophy as spiritual exercise.

This project is its own spiritual exercise with Lyotard and Pseudo-Dionysius’ content as its model. As explored in chapter two, Lyotard reveals postmodernism, inspired by Freudian *Durcharbeitung*, as re-reading and re-writing. Postmodernism, like faith, is an activity, and not a solitary means to a predetermined answer. As Lyotard took up the bind of the Holocaust survivor and undertook the endeavor for a new idiom by which she could testify, this project has taken up his inexpressible and endeavored to express it through re-reading Pseudo-Dionysius’ most productive names for God: silence and *eros*. This activity within the dissertation diagnosed many paths and found the most rewarding to be the one wherein one enters the perplexity and persistently takes up and works through the many idioms that could promise to solve it. This intensely aestheticized, phenomenological situation of Lyotard’s permits the final chapter to employ the agitation of *eros*, demonstrated by Pseudo-Dionysius, and the garrulous expression of reverent silence, demonstrated by both thinkers, to most truthfully begin to express that which resists logic.

The fourth chapter began from a plateau that had firmly established the necessity by which the inexpressible *must* be expressed and how Lyotard’s every attempted
expression of it had failed in some regard. Lyotard, initially, had rejected silence as a productive response for the survivor, as chapter one revealed. Initially, he had likewise rejected the Christian narrative of love as an ultimately productive address to the differend, as chapter four revealed. Nevertheless, this final chapter conducted a co-re-reading of Lyotard and Pseudo-Dionysius that founds a conceptual symbiosis born form the compatible natures of silence and *eros* as simultaneously void and overfull of meaning at once that was consistent with both thinkers. This necessitated that silence had to be heard through the passions and *eros* had to be addressed with reverence and a logical-abatement of silence and opened a path for the formation of an impossible idiom. Silence and *eros* permits an idiom that peaceably maintains multiple inner contradictions of lack and plenitude. This synthesis ultimately demonstrated its productivity by undermining the limitations of the revisionist logic while also evading the varying faults to which narrow conceptions of love or silence and the diverse reasons to which Stein, Wittgenstein, Adorno, and the Cashinahua fell prey.

The idiom born from the symbiosis of silence and *eros* is a productive solution for speaking the unspeakable even as its verification of its truth before a skeptic or court re-invokes all of the questions arising mid-way through *The Differend*. How can they hear silence when they forbid its legitimacy? This stumbling block, however, may be the point. To live the reflective life is to pick up the argument and re-read it through again and not to be yet another interlocutor who runs from Socrates at the end of the dialogue. Continuation may seem futile, as Nietzsche implies at the end of the second essay of his *Genealogy of Morals*, by asking: are you constructing an ideal or destroying one? What
new altars would we have to raise in order to destroy old ideals?\textsuperscript{457} But, he proffers us his implication through a wearying series of questions. Nietzsche shows us what Lyotard tells us, that questions call for response, however impossible a final answer may be: “The question already has its answer: another question” (§104). Understanding the answer to be a question reveals an even deeper implication of the very value of continuing, according to Nietzsche: “One skill is needed — lost today, unfortunately — for the practice of reading as an art: the skill to ruminate, which cows possess but modern man lacks.”\textsuperscript{458} The truth that burdens the lover of wisdom is that we must express the inexpressible and that there is no single expression nor is there an end.

The awareness of the müssein invokes our responsibility and that responsibility is heightened when awareness of its eternal engagement emerges, but, is the responsibility we bear to responding to the inexpressible responsibly bourn out when no political program can come of our response? The deflation of the task’s impossibility is revealed in Lyotard’s final passage of The Differend:

> But the occurrence doesn’t make a story, does it? —Indeed, it’s not a sign. But it is to be judged, all the way through to its incomparability. You can’t make a political ‘program’ with it, but you can bear witness to it. —And what if no one hears the testimony, etc. (No. 1ff)? —Are you prejudging the Is it happening? (§264).

Yet, this conclusion to his work also reveals his sly smile, his optimism that must be considered absurd in light of his work and its demonstrated impossibility of erasing differends. Ereignis, the arrive-t-il, the occurrence, the Is it happening?, does not make a story that the survivor can tell the revisionist, the witness can tell the jury, the


\textsuperscript{458} \textit{Ibid.}, Preface, §VIII.
grandmother can tell her young grandchild, the activist can tell the populace, the senator can tell the senate. Yet, every event must be judged, analysed to its moment of collapse, have its translation into practical action shown to be impossible, and every event must be witnessed, must be impossibly expressed even if there are no ears capable of hearing it (as in the case for silent, erotic testimony). Why? Because we cannot prejudge the occurrence. Of course the necessity of witnessing and realization of deaf audiences throws us back to the beginning of the book. Of course to hope at the end that the book will turn out different upon rereading is absurd. But, this absurdity, in full awareness of its nature as absurd, is what Lyotard is revealing throughout the work as the necessity for the work.

Thus, we must ask, why can we not prejudge the occurrence even when it cannot found an ethical maxim, draft a law, form a society, give us a platform to preach from to prevent the next holocaust or, at least, give us a few party lines with which to concretely respond to the revisionists and hate mongers? A critic has a surplus of fodder to identify Lyotard’s conclusion as an eschewal of action parallel to Heidegger’s shameful, silent retreat to his hut after WWII and to the disdain held against Adorno for his political silence in obedience to his negative philosophy that refuses a positive stance from which something could be done. The parallels may be accurate even if the disdain for all three may be rash; irrespective, I maintain that Lyotard, still, differs.

Some political programs could easily be grafted upon his words or germinated from within them. This is clear from the profusion of “pop” postmodernisms dismissed in the beginning of chapter two. They are not impossible, nor forbidden, they are just not successful in undoing differends and wholly encapsulating events. All political programs
will become narratives, they will transmodulate into their own re-presentation and undo their own productivity.459 Nevertheless, in the face of their failure, in some instances they may be called for: they may be productive even when they will ultimately fail. They will also fail, however, because a differend calls us to take it up and work it through. This is an active and living therapy that never ends and never remains static long enough for the possibility of the construction of a perfect political program.

Lyotard, himself, experienced this painful coming to awareness of the failure of political programs during his resignation in 1966 from “Pouvoir Ouvrier,” a group born from the schism of “Socialisme ou Barbarie,” that published a journal of the same name and to which Lyotard had been a foundational member and writer for over a decade. His resignation from this group and his dearest friends, from political action, and from his theoretical base in Marxism was spurned by a creeping awareness of dialectical materialism becoming more an idiom than a universal reality. He writes, “These questions frightened me in themselves because of the formidable theoretical tasks they promised, and also because they seemed to condemn anyone who gave himself over to them to the abandonment of any militant practice for an indeterminate time.”460 His awareness of the failure of the political program was accompanied by the overwhelmingly fearful and inspiring realization of the plethora of possible responses.

459 Outside of Lyotard, this has been broadly discussed and invoked in the Nietzsche comment, above, concerning the altars that must be constructed to replace all those one breaks. Further, cf., Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s discussion of how the majority co-opts and corrupts, ultimately undoing, all minoritarian programs (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980). An interesting analysis can also be found in the introduction to Joshua Landy and Michael Saler’s The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 1-14, concerning what a secular re-enchantment must include so as to fill the “God shaped void” of our disenchanted modern age (Ibid., 2).

His awakening to the fault lines of Marxism prohibits his honest and wholehearted participation in militant action, limiting his action to the role of the seeker in *aporia*, uncertain of the truth but certain of the pursuit:

> Your words had stuck in my heart and I was *hedged around about on all sides by Thee*. Of your eternal life I was now certain, although I had seen it in an enigma and *as through a glass*. But I had ceased to have any doubt that there was an incorruptible substance from which came every substance. I no longer desired to be more certain of you, only to stand more firmly in you.461

These words are from Book Eight of Augustine’s *Confessions* and their radical collusion with and difference from Lyotard illuminate the persistence of faith, an absurd optimism, in an awareness of the disintegration of previous beliefs and an explanation of how one’s oeuvre of radical politics naturally led to extensive notebooks on the Saint. By no means am I suggesting Lyotard “found God” after giving up Marxism. No, rather, he found himself, like the Saint, surrounded by questions and hedged about by the truth. He, like Augustine, sought to find how one memorializes truth. Both wanted to keep alive in memory the event that brought them to the truth. Lyotard had never not known the questions against Marxism or against the success of political programs, but he had always been able to reconcile them and arbitrate away their differences. It was not necessarily a concrete truth he sought to replace what truth Marxism had been, but to embrace the truth that is to stand firmly in active engagement with the productivity of philosophy that persists through the eventual failure of all paradigms.

Lyotard, like Augustine before God, finds himself enraptured, in fear and awe, by the radical unsettling of the ground beneath his feet when Marxism’s totalizing message ruptures. How does one begin to know what cannot be known, memorialize what resists

is grasp out of the recesses of memory? When every attempt to encapsulate it and express it fails, Lyotard still invites the event and asks us to judge it to and through its incomparability. But, to what can he proceed to consolidate his search and to what ground can he stand upon to have the possibility to judge? The final chapter shows how he can proceed to silence and *eros*. If these prove not to be the last option, then he can then proceed to other, further forms of linguistic play to endeavor, again, to capture the inexpressible in every object of knowledge. If they do dissolve that differend, he can still, then, proceed on to other, new logical binds. These binds, likewise, he can address through even other mediums of representation, such as art or music or, like the Saint, autobiography.

Thought must, to use his own, preferred images, cast itself adrift between the archipelagos of thought or become like the shape-shifting clouds, always open to new configurations and reinterpretations. As he drifted from, *Dérive à partir de Marx et Freud*, he had to drift to something new: “We have to drift.”\(^{462}\) Lyotard claimed that when he was a boy he desired to become “a monk (especially a Dominican), a painter, or historian.”\(^{463}\) He admits these youthful desires because he was once asked to lecture upon his “position,” and the path that had led him there. He was led to his position, that of a positionlessness, by these three, desired vocations: “The monk seems to be suggested by the law, the painter by forms and colors, the historian by events.”\(^{464}\) Thus, that to


which Lyotard may proceed and that by which he may judge, his position, is the drift
between law, form and color, and events.

In legal language, Lyotard begins *The Differend* to explore the nature of binds that
violently wrong the witness unable to bear witness to those events that overflow their
encapsulation. Augustine confessed his faith to God even in the face of the absurdity of
offering a confession to an omniscient God. God knows without the faithful giving
testimony, for one *is* testimony in one’s being insofar as He is one’s creator and the suffix
*monium* signifies one’s action, condition, state of being a *testis*, a witness.\(^{465}\) The
religious and legal blur together, just as Lyotard intertwines his voice with Augustine’s in
his writings on the Saint, blurring their pursuits of the ineffable into an artistic
expression. Just as Plato’s dialogue on justice, *The Republic*, concludes, not with a
rational delineation of legal or ethical maxims, but with a myth, Lyotard’s exploration
into the prohibition of testimony by narrow logic ends in reason’s rupture by the
passions.\(^{466}\) Just as Plato’s myth of the solider Er witnessing the judgment of souls may
be interpreted as aesthetic pedagogy proffering an image one ought to emulate in order to
lead one’s own life to the good life, Lyotard’s engagement of the plethora of responses to
the inexpressible represent his aesthetic response to the sublime and its address through
the spiritual exercise of philosophy.

Er may well be *eros*. He, Er or Lyotard or Pseudo-Dionysius, interchangeably
and equally, *is/are* the model(s) for our desire to live the good life. The just life is a life
well lived even as any life is more can be captured by naming the just as any single rule

\(^{465}\) Testimony is from the Latin *testimonium*, evidence or proof; it is composed of the conjunction of *testis*,
or witness, and *monium*, which signifies an action, condition, or state of being. The term is implicitly
religious and initially was a denomination of the Ten Commandments.

or law. Plato could not conclude with a delineation of just action, but can inspire us
toward the good life by a story. A story can better represent that which is mutable and
more than we can delineate and universalize. Lyotard cannot conclude _The Differend_
with a final solution, nor even a story, because the event is more than any single
narrative, but he can refuse us a story, tell us it is fiction, and give us a wink.

Lyotard found the truth, the faithful persistence in the face of impossibility (that
every wink is propaedeutic to a new story), in that which Corinthians captures and the
Saint references in the passage above:

> For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is
> perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away…. For now
> we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part;
> but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith,
> hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.467

This truth, for Lyotard, is not divine union wherein the “prefect is come,” but the
abidance by faith, hope, and charity in training one’s eyes to see through the darkened
glass. This is most accurate for Lyotard if one opens up the notion of charity into that of
love (for the _Oxford English Dictionary_ did note the deplorable lack of fixity in the
Vulgate’s translation of charity, four times to one, into love), into that exception he holds
out against everything else.468

All humanity has a responsibility before and to the inexpressible. To act is to live
up to the responsibility, even when the outcome fails. To recognize the inevitability of
failure and act anyway is the only possible way by which we may be surprised; and, only

---

467 1 Corinthians 13:9-13. The collusion of intellectual therapy and desire, in conjunction with religion, is
provocatively captured in Ingmar Bergman’s 1961 Swedish film that borrows the text for its title: “Through
a Glass, Darkly” [“Sasom i en spegel”]. Therein, the protagonist is stricken by the realization that her
mental health and comfort, that she felt granted by an acknowledgement from God, is granted, instead, by a
horrific spider, thus collapsing her growing health, stability, and faith in reality.

468 Cf., chapter four, section two, above, for the etymology of love and chapter four, section four on
Lyotard’s exception of love and its analysis by Bataille.
thus, is the possibility of an otherwise-ending, the possibility that a miracle may happen. Abraham raises his axe to kill his son. Only with the intention of his action succeeding is his action true and, therefore, interrupted by the hand of God. Had he expected a miracle, his action could not be a genuine act of faith. For any of us to expect an answer to a logical bind, whether as an expression of an impossible testimony or an empirically verifiable fact about God, is to foreclose the very possibility of their expression. To expect an expression of the inexpressible as an answer to its own question is to discount the genuine nature of philosophy as a \textit{striving} to know in \textit{aporia}.
REFERENCES


