On Michael Cross's *Haecceities* 

A Group Review & Sourcebook

## LRL e-editions

 $\ensuremath{\mathbb{C}}$  2011 Taylor Brady, David Brazil, Michael Cross, Thom Donovan, Brenda Iijima, C.J. Martin, Kyle Schlesinger, Jamie Townsend

Acknowledgments

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# On Michael Cross's *Haecceities*

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Group Review 5

Taylor Brady's Unabridged Jacket Copy 47

"Notes on Labor and Regeneration" by Michael Cross  $5\ 1$ 

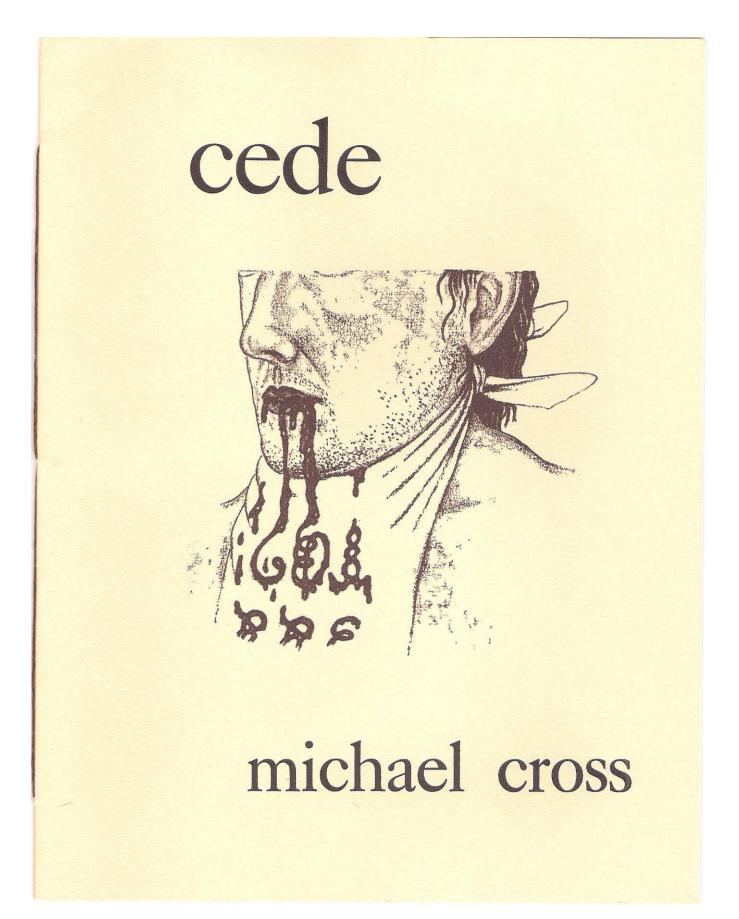
Appendix: Redactions of "Plinth Course" 59



## Group Review of Michael Cross's Haecceities

David Brazil, Thom Donovan, Brenda lijima, C.J. Martin, Kyle Schlesinger, and Jamie Townsend

The following discussion was conducted via email between 9/10-2/11.



CJ Martin <cm49600@gmail.com> Sat, Sep 18, 2010 at 3:47 PM To: Thom Donovan <wildhorsesoffire@gmail.com>Cc:jamietownsend<greybridge@gmail.com>,brenda@yoyolabs. com, Kyle Schlesinger <kyle@email.com>

Hi all—Here's a first approach:

#### "the meadow in the throat" (Haecceities 41)

The figure of Robert Duncan looms large in *Haecceities* (Cuneiform Press, 2010). In fact, it seems in some ways that Michael has revisited Duncan's meadow in order to divest it of some sort of ritual that had taken root there, but I'd like to ask how work that so engages the wardrobe of ritual can take up that particular labor.

In the preamble to a reading from Passages, delivered in Buffalo in 1982 (& followed by a sermon), Duncan lets out: "The *idea* of Kings accused Kings." (Preach it!!) This is a speech wherein Duncan refuses the characterization of his own work as that of a mystic, as elsewhere in that preamble: "My only possible mysticism is the experience I have of language." This might be part of what Cross seeks to confront: in *Haecceities*, language is labor, not belief. I want to understand the nature of the threat of mysticism in Michael's work, because it seems to me that those vestiges of ritual crop up as a violence, a confrontation.

In Duncan's introduction to Letters, he writes:

And here I declare a mood, a mode, in writing, conceived as a tuning of the language, as the ear, hand and eye, brain are tuned—towards a possible music. Incapable of love, I have made-up love: I am servant of the Love. Incapable of writing, I have made-up writing: servant of the genius that lies in the language before which I have no genius. (xiv)

For me, *Haecceities* often reads as an attempt to distance the work from *even this level* of involvement in mysticism, since it fabricates the nature of one's entry into language, misconstruing and even romanticizing language's relation to 'music' and 'invention.' SONG may already have been long gone and only accessible via fetish, by a certain nostalgia of fetish, even in Duncan. But in Michael's new book, I think SONG's a fabrication (the poems persistently equate construction with constriction): forged as a product of labor is forged. And I wonder if ritual in *Haecceities* isn't, then, a fabrication of a fabrication, a giving the lie to a lie in a lie. So that "the meadow in the throat" arrives as *a place of first restriction*—lodged in the airway, as it were—as opposed to what we hear of how Duncan found it.

I had mentioned earlier that I wanted also to trace out Michael's proximity to Gerard Manley Hopkins, and my first thought is that his greatest engagement of Hopkins' work might be in deploying a set of sonic materials so idiomatic as to be occult. In both poets' work, this means that it's difficult to position them among their contemporaries (though Michael's involvement with small press communities makes context a different issue with him). In terms of the poems, though, the materials stand out as already obsolesced, defunct, perfunctory, and made use of in "a tuning of the language" towards sounding a labor of critique (where Hopkins might be said to have been tuning towards a spiritual labor).

So another question I have is, what does it mean to be reading this work in 2010? To attend a labor of this sort *now*, if, as in the Adorno epigraph to "The Pales," "It is as labor, not as communication, that the subject in art comes into its own." Whose labor? Is attendance as labor involved in that other labor? Is 'audience' an evacuated form? What is the labor of attending these labors?

I love Taylor's statement on this book, but somehow I wonder if it isn't in some ways impossibly *avant* of a contemporary readership, and I fear that there's so much more work to be done on the side of reception in order to activate a space for it to be possible (in the first place) for readers of these poems to work "the waste margin in which to glean a new life in common with words."

I mean, I sense that part of the work of attending these poems (as labors) involves divesting myself of my own 'ear' my 'eye' my 'vocabularies' my 'tools,' even if I can recognize in these poems the hollowed out or evacuated forms of an antiquity in verse—reclaimed, revisited, reoccupied. I think it'd be important, then, to hear at some point what others of you do (as readers) to make legible for yourselves the "waste margin" Taylor speaks of: are there receptive tools we could offer for this sifting, this sounding through refuse? Particularly for those contemporary readers who might fear that—simply by virtue of inhabiting the treacherously evacuated architectures of *Haecceities*—the occult might threaten to body forth as a visitation on the uninitiated, who can't incant!

More in a bit-CJ

Kyle Schlesinger <kyle@email.com> Mon, Sep 20, 2010 at 12:28 PM To: Chris Martin <cm49600@gmail.com>, thom donovan <wildhorsesoffire@gmail.com> Cc: jamie townsend <greybridge@gmail.com>, Brenda Iijima <brenda@yoyolabs.com>

Dear Chris, Thom, Brenda, & Jamie,

As publisher and dear friend of the author, I'm honored that you've taken it upon yourselves to compose a collective review of Michael's *Haecceities*. As much time as I've spent with the manuscript, there are many questions that the book continues to present, and of course that is one of the reasons we share in an ongoing, revolving interest in Michael's work.

Like Duncan, Bay Area poet-critic Michael Cross is no doubt a great orator and performer. The CDs and MP3s he has given me over the years have taught me as much about his ear as the work itself, and in fact, I don't think I was able to appreciate the asymmetry of his rhythm and his relentless celebration of dissonance, deep bass, thumping backbeats and bizarre echoes until he told me about his young love of Grandmaster Flash. Although we're about the same age, we

grew up on opposite coasts, and I believe that our earliest musical lexicons and affinities have a great deal to do with how we write and listen to poetry (opening one box of CDs, I see disks by Peter Brotzmann, Animal Collective, and Sun Kil Moon with his handwriting on them).

I think Chris is right to note that Duncan looms large in Haecceities: "....parallels and affinities here are not operations toward a philosophy but operations of a fabrication, open possibilities of design." (23) "this is the orange measurement of the lines as I design them." (35) "Will you drive me to madness only there to know me? vomiting images into the place of the Law!" (69) to list the excerpts by Duncan in the epigraphs alone. One could write a treatise on the epigraphs alone—Heidegger, Badiou, Bataille, Derrida, and Spicer among those that appear at least twice, reminding us that in addition to his work as a poet, Cross is equally at home in the world of criticism and scholarship; he is one who reads with a pencil in hand and writes with an open book on the desk. Although it may be obvious given our own backgrounds, I don't want to take it for granted that the epigraphs suggest that the author is involved in a dialogue between critical theory, philosophy, and poetry, a take on writing that is still quite radical, if not in superficial theory, certainly as a sincere practice in the world of poetry at large.

Chris, heartfelt thanks to you for putting out the first post. Could you talk about how you arrived at your proposition about the "nature of the threat of mysticism" in Michael's work via. Duncan? Particular poems or lines that jump out at you? Up until reading your post, I hadn't associated the book with mysticism in any way. I'm not sure if everyone has quick access to the *OED*, so I've taken the liberty of posting the definition of "haecceity" below.

OX//KS

### hæcceity

#### SECOND EDITION 1989 Scholastic Philos.

(hksit, hik-) Also 7 hæccity. [ad. med.L. hæcceitt-em 'thisness' (Duns Scotus), f. hæc, fem. of hc this.]

The quality implied in the use of *this*, as *this man*; 'thisness'; 'hereness and nowness'; that quality or mode of being in virtue of which a thing is or becomes a definite individual; individuality. **1647** R. BARON <<u>http://dictionary.oed.com.ruby2.uhv.edu/help/bib/oed2-b.html</u>#r-baron>

*Cyprian Acad.* 6 Club-fisted Logick with all her Quiddities..nor Scotus with his hæccities. **1678** CUDWORTH <http://dictionary.oed.com.ruby2.uhv.edu/help/bib/oed2-c4.html#cudworth> *Intell. Syst.* I. ii. §8. 67 Scholasticks..could not make a Rational Discourse of anything, though never so small, but they must stuff if with their Quiddities, Entities, Essences, Hæcceities, and the like. **1837** WHEWELL <http://dictionary.oed.com.ruby2.uhv. edu/help/bib/oed2-w2.html#whewell> *Hist. Induct. Sc.* (1857) I. 244 Duns Scotus..placed the principle of Individuation in 'a certain determining positive entity' which his school called *Hæcceity* or *thisness.* **1890** *Jrnl. Educ.* 1 Nov. 629/1 Of course, if provision is made only for his general humanity and not for what makes him *hic* or *ille*, not for his*hæcceity* as the schoolmen used to say, a man will have cause to complain.

Thom Donovan <wildhorsesoffire@gmail.com> Mon, Sep 20, 2010 at 9:18 PM To: Kyle Schlesinger <kyle@email.com> Cc: Chris Martin <cm49600@gmail.com>, jamie townsend <greybridge@gmail.com>, Brenda Iijima <bre>openda@yoyolabs.com>

It is fortuitous reading your reference to "the meadow in the throat," Chris. Because this past week I just finished an essay for Rethinking Marxism on "animal communism" in regards to the cinema of the Armenian-Soviet filmmaker, Artavazd Peleshian. And some of my thinking in this essay, I think, is in line with how I have always understood Michael's work, if not the person behind the writing. That the poem may mark the place where the human surpasses itself not in its human nature nor in a prostheses per se but through its animal nature. In Peleshian's films (which you can watch via Ubuweb) you see shepherds tumbling in waterfalls with their sheep, and sliding down steep hills in freefall. Here, as Wallace Stevens says, the "deer and the dachshund" are one. But whereas Stevens was talking about analogy and resemblance, I think what Peleshian (and Michael) get at is a recognition of the animal-human condition as a univocal one: which is to say, the human-animal is of one substance, a phylum of common expression. What's more, at least in Peleshian, they are utterly collaborative and codependent. Their symbiosis and codependence is felt and real, such as in the scenes of shepherding. Which brings me back to the "meadow in the throat ." Of course I also hear Duncan in this line. But before Duncan, further back from Duncan, I hear an entire pastoral tradition (I guess we are as far back as Virgil). (And if you look at the third issue of *P-Queue* (ed. Sarah Campbell), Michael actually has an essay about "Pales," "Labor and Regeneration." I don't know if we could solicit a copy of this text from Michael, but it would be interesting to look at it together since it reveals some of Michael's intertexts and a lot of the thinking behind the book while it was in process early on.) What is striking to me in this little, but extremely dense, lyrical essay is how Michael relates the project of *Haecceities* through an acknowledgment of the pastoral tradition in relation to what he calls "invocation," which I take to be the calling upon of a muse in submission (or "permission" to use Duncan's phrase). To be called upon in such a way is to labor (as a slave or an animal or for that matter a mother giving birth labors). And it is to presence the violence of this laboring-what elsewhere Michael calls "event" and "becoming" after a discourse of recent French philosophy. Maybe let's remain with this question of labor, because I do very much think this is one of Michael's big questions. What is labor? How is labor an animal-human quality? How is the poem (or any act of cultural production for that matter) a matter of laboring opening upon or into our freedom (the "meadow" of which you speak; the "wastes" whereof Taylor evokes a commons where our production capacities and consumptive necessities are relatively synched). An assignment of sorts: read Giorgio Agamben's The Open [where he discusses disinhibition], then look at reproductions of Francis Bacon's paintings of various animals (and humans) in rings, then read Duncan's "The Matter of the Bees." These are core texts for me, among a vast intertextuality scaffolding (or being the scaffolding in absentia) of Michael's work. In this Michael is like Duncan (who actually left us many many clues to his intertextuality/reading practice), but more like Zukofsky, who stopped leaving us clues to his intertextuality at some point—80 Flowers being a culmination of this

strategy, so much that works like Michelle Legott's *Reading 80 Flowers* were warranted, and actually a pleasure to read as supplementary literature. One may also read Michael's relatively few critical offerings online, which I found revealing reading them today. Especially the text re: Duncan in relation to Nancy and Badiou. Can we return to the "meadow in the throat" this way? The principal site of Michael's z-cited path? I've never heard him make reference to it, but I always think about Michael's work in relation to Kleist's conception of grace, which he articulates in the marionette theatre essay—where the animal and God are inverted through their mutual necessity. Michael's lines strive for this necessity: they are a form of submission, forms of *animal grace*. Perhaps the animal, the human, and divine alike achieve "grace" through this infinite submission that is a laboring of invocation. And perhaps whatever opens, opens from this. That is, the freedom afforded in Michael's lines both allegorize and embody this condition of freedom. A dance that brings about events, or that simply are *evental* (see Michael in his piece on Duncan, Badiou, Nancy linked at The Disinhibitor). In reference to John Taggart's work, Duncan referred to this as a "starsong of possession." But the flipside of this starsong is disaster. The fact that in the line—a line that dances, that is movement and process and event, "we" is wrecked. Taggart says, in Crosses I believe, that through caesura one makes crosses in a ground—the line of the poem as ground or plinth. I have always found this figure ironic, given that Michael's poetic forms are consistently caesuric. The line moving within itself. Or simply, movement happening within the line. Besides acting hieroglyphically (a fact Leslie notes in her blurb), and besides the fact that they shore-up the remains of a vigorous and critical reading practice, Michael's use of rarefied and antique words labor towards this movement. A kind of scholastic rap song. An over-codification of 'verse' through spelling, etymology, printed qualities....

**CJ Martin <cm49600@gmail.com> Tue, Sep 21, 2010 at 9:40 AM** To: Kyle Schlesinger <kyle@email.com>, brenda@yoyolabs.com, jamie townsend <greybridge@gmail.com>, Thom Donovan <wildhorsesoffire@gmail.com>

Hi all—Thanks, Kyle, for the invitation to add more on the threadt of mysticism. & Thom, let's definitely request a copy of Michael's essay on "The Pales"—I had no idea this was out there!! It could be republished in tandem w/this review, even (did you already say that?). Brenda & Jamie—my apologies for jumping back in here, but this will come down to our individual schedules, I think—I have a window now that I may or may not have later, so I wanted to respond to Kyle's initial request for clarification. Hope that's okay. Will otherwise hold off & chew on Thom's jam-packed post! & will look forward to hearing more from everyone soon!

So, Kyle:

Proviso 1: While Michael was cutting his verse-teeth on Grandmaster Flash, I was memorizing the Mötley Crüe catalogue. Meaning, I'm a sucker for satanism (if only as decoration)—so please feel free to tell me to stop seeing pentagrams where there are only asterisks...

Proviso 2: My first offering is backlit by a memory of conversations I had with Michael in

and out of a seminar in Buffalo in 2005. I remember him drawing a line with Walter Benjamin at precisely the messianic thread in WB's thought—Michael & some other folks in the conversation jumped ship w/Benjamin there. Also in & around the discussion that winter: Michael's reading of the H.D. Book (the summer prior, if I remember correctly). The poems in *Haecceities* were already in progress at this point, & some of them were being written during that seminar.

But for some reason(s), I've really never been able to subtract mysticism from the various systems that *Haecceities* calls to account. The sovereign and the initiate are always married in my reading of these poems. Particularly, though, the rather treacherous relationship to incantation that these poems court (formally) alongside the dismantling of the practice—and of verse culture's proximity to it—in a poem like "CEDE." I've attached the cover from the Vigilance chap of that poem here, which conveys a bit of the threat (as I understand it). (Is it beside the point that I keep seeing images of Chick Tracts in this cover??) I remember Rich Owens offered a really useful characterization of the Vigilance publishing project a couple of years ago, in which he also registered the threat:

The authors of these publications know as little about their source as those who receive them. Although each Vigilance publication appears to be a single-author work, or at least bears the name of an author, the authors of these works receive them in the same mysterious way readers do. And for those that receive them—do they arrive as a warning? Do they mark us as irresponsible poets and intellectuals? Or do they affirm the work we do as intellectual laborers, as producers of culture critical of cultural production? Each of these publications is clearly the product of labor, but I worry that this is a labor which comes for us — for our sons and daughters, our mothers and fathers, for the ones that we love.

I always loved that description, and I think it's particularly apt in the case of "CEDE." It's also a useful way to double back into labor in/as this book: "I worry that this is a labor which comes for us." But first I just wanted to try & work through at least one place where *Haecceities* takes up initiation (& animalia, which I hope to hear more about!!).

For me, "CEDE"'s all about "the lip of law" (48)—which we might think of as the wedding chapel (as it were) for the marriage of the (many) sovereigns here & the mystic—& incantation's the motor for the marriage:

candor is enough to say the swallow at the sovran's tongue

an aufheben at least at the trauma and to grasp-begriff-to grasp and fork

the cantor of his paréd throat; here the Tlingit coffin is a fosse said

scored the rest, one hundred twenty-seven times at rest the death par-ergon

candor lends its name to cede we see the matron and her switch betwixt Apollo's

four bronz'd tongues: the rest its name, rather, cede it as a legacy

Cowls, hoods and habits with their wearers tost / Long after, now unpeopl'd, and untrod

12

In my reading of this last section of the poem, the push is to "cede it as a legacy"—to be the reason for the cantor's "paréd throat." That first line sends us back to "the meadow in the throat" && to the animal in the meadow ("the swallow" doing a double labor in that line as bird and as oral obstruction). I like here that "candor is enough"— -it seems so simple, so direct for these poems—almost couched as a solution! Except that CANDOR/CANTOR is the play here & trauma's in the middle—-& the work before this work is neither simple nor direct.

More? (Happy to add more at some point, but will stop here for now!)

jamie townsend <greybridge@gmail.com> Mon, Sep 27, 2010 at 2:08 PM To: CJ Martin <cm49600@gmail.com> Cc: Kyle Schlesinger <kyle@email.com>, brenda@yoyolabs.com, Thom Donovan <wildhorsesoffire@gmail.com>

Hi All So after a week in *Haecceities* I've finally emeged for a bit of a breath. CJ and Thom, your notes so far have given me quite a bit to think about, so my first response jumps off from and explores further a few of the ideas thus far presented. Brenda can't wait to see what you've been working on as well. Hope you are all having a nice Monday so far (it is a rainy one in Philly today, but finally cool):

Could an issue of *becoming* – as Michael takes up in his linking of Duncan to Rob Halpern's "SITUATION-BEING ON A ROCK" in his Jacket review of Rumored Place - be a productive point of reference in terms of ritual & labor? In this case, it seems, the ritual of the word, the sounding not production of "field" – unnamed, fluid (I use "sounding" here because it suggests an active gauging of space, or an inter-action in the sense of producing echo, echo even of that which could have occurred – "the afterimage of utopic possibility" (Jacket 29)). I am also thinking particularly of Olson's breath poetics (body centered, energetic, situating a sense of ritual & potentiality), but also his writing on the transformation of the idea of "labor" practice in the New World: "Or Smith, / who came to Monhegan / to catch whales / and found cod, instead?" ("Some Good News" - The Maximus Poems 127-128). Maximus is struck through with "afterimages" of a potentialized history; a primary romantic expanse, Olson's initial concern with SPACE, which becomes transformed into industry — the early peak of commercial fishing, the North Atlantic waters boiling over with silver (both bodies and currency) — that this movement into a figured ritual labor is somehow more practical, or at least more immediate, but still holds a sense of the timeless, an old energy that once again enters as the activity. Opening up the concept of labor seems very important here because it serves as a way to reframe (As Olson does in Maximus) the concept of utilitarian labor and its assumed goals within a (now "late") capitalist economy. Moving past the "thought of" to the "event" – even as the "event" is marked by a kind of figuration, all ties into the shapeshifting nature of the body's engaging in (becoming through) exercision. Muscle constriction (is the "field" or "meadow" created in the throat? or a "field poetics" that pastoralizes, breaks open conception?) enacts a labor of the throat, and sounding becomes an exercise, an attempt to render an immediacy.

I am wondering if the idea of surpassing is the point where the body meets the meadow; Thom, your thoughts on "submission" in regards to invocation – what I am currently thinking about as a "labor" or "exercise" of the throat – seem extremely important because of its ability to speak directly to simultaneous physical and metaphysical states (the cross-hatchings of ritualized act where the horizontal and vertical planes converge). The Olson epigraph for CARDINAL puts forth a broadening perspective by removing previously held static referents and, in their place, focuses instead on degree of light, of illumination: ("Even line gone, And maybe color-as too easy"). In Olson's short essay on Cy Twombly, from which this quote is taken, candor is held together concurrently with whiteness. The use of "candor" (with its later pairing, as you pointed out CJ, of "cantor") suggests to me that dialectic discussed around "meadow in the throat", one of openness and constriction. Candor as "open speech" but also, in an older sense, candor as "purity" of speech (as the cantor leads the liturgy with a focus on both the potentiality of music at all times as well as its precise rendering). So what develops from this tension is a sense of open precision (I read somewhere that Mark E. Smith said that the reason he liked Captain Beefheart so much because he was "freeform with discipline" – I think that's the type of tension I'm trying to get at). I sense this "open precision" throughout *Haecceities* in the same way I sense Olson's presence as a guide to a palimpsized history that Michael is exploring with his lexicon. "Pushing off a history I face toward" (Haecceities 39) - dismantling a conventional conception of the record, taking away the "line" (Thom, this automatically refers me to your recent work around the concept of "future anteriority" which plays an important role in the writings of Taylor Brady & Rob Halpern as well – seemingly a central concern to a lot of discussion among Nonsite participants, would love to hear more on this if it feels appropriate). This also refers me back again to Michael's review of Rumored Place: "the event infiltrates the stasis of the *enframed* to intimate the new, the other" or, as he later describes as "a fidelity of becoming." This new "enframing" appears in CEDE as Twombly's "frame [that] maintains its course of shape / the frame-abyss..." (Haecceities 54), and, in turn, this "frame-abyss" echoes back the Heidegger epigraph to PLINTH COURSE "... The composed rift is the fugue of truth's shinning." That throughout the text there are transmutations or evolutions of this idea of a framed absence, or framed whiteness, and these elements work together to create a space between action and event (Duncan's "open possibilities of design"?), a place for the text to be. I am very interested on what I am seeing as the dual roles "abyss" plays throughout the text, but maybe more thoughts on that later.

Looking forward!

-J

Brenda Iijima <brenda@yoyolabs.com> Thu, Sep 30, 2010 at 8:12 PM Reply-To: Brenda@yoyolabs.com To: Thom Donovan <wildhorsesoffire@gmail.com> Cc: CJ Martin <cm49600@gmail.com>, jamie townsend <greybridge@gmail.com>, Kyle Schlesinger <kyle@email.com>

Hi CJ, Thom, Jamie and Kyle-saying in advance that I'll hardly make a dent, but here goes

anyway and sorry for my supreme delay....really loving all the saturated statements you all contributed thus far.

I made a back door entrance into Haecceities through a reading of M. M. Bakhtin's chapter, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics" (Dialogic Imagination) where Bakhtin writes about, "the process of assimilating real historical time and space in literature" which seems so apropos for studying Michael's anachronistic notational form of the temporal-spatial—a symbol of this might be how Michael situates the cairn that appears in 'Sacred'. A cairn is a pile of stones possibly of varying geology (crushed down former life/material presence) stacked as sepulchral monument (commemorating labor/work of bodies?) or as marker to deliniate pathways in a terrain. Haecceities is a massive conglomeration, a sort of cairn. Within this conglomeration there begins to appear a philosophical bestiary (Derrida's term) troubling the stakes.

In the essay by Bakhtin he parses the infamous The Golden Ass, a tale from antiquity where the main character, Lucius, enthralled by magic and magical spells attempts to metamorphosis into a bird but accidently transforms himself into an ass. This observation by Bakhtin got me thinking about the way animals are introduced in Haecceities:

"Playing the lowest role in the lowest level of society, Lucius does not participate internally in that life and is, therefore, in an even better position to observe it and study all its secrets. For him this is the experience of studying and understanding human beings. 'I myself,' says Lucius, 'remember my sojourn as an ass with great gratitude, for having suffered the turns of fate under cover of this animal's skin I have become, if not wiser, at least more experienced...'The position of an ass is a particularly convenient one for observing the secrets of everyday life. The presence of an ass embarrasses no one, all open up completely." p. 122.

In this segment from Bakhtin's essay it is clear the heriarchy that is asserted, namely, the ontological understandings and predicaments of the animal, (especially the work animal) is not of interest—it is the human that garners all the attention. Being animal is about having identities removed. The individuated 'subject' is dismissed. But, the illegibility of the animal becomes a convenient mirror that reveals human exploitation and privation in all its forms. The vantage point of the work animal provides insight into the functioning systems of labor that act as social control for both animals and humans. Animals maintain the bottom rung of the caste system regulated by humans—having replaced humans as the most productive resource. There's Silvia Federici's point too: "as the Age of Reason crept upon humanity, and conformity became a central paradigm in the West, humans were dissociated from the corporeal." Caliban and the Witch, p. 135. Then there is a concern that problematizes further: "if humans look at animals and see only the reflection of ourselves, we deny them the reality of their own existence. Then it becomes possible to forget their plight." (Coral Lansbury, The Old Brown Dog: Women, Workers, and Vivisection in Edwardian England, p.188)

Not all of the animals that appear in Haecceities are heraldic (or signify privilege, rarity and power), but many are (heraldic animals may not necessarily be excused from indentured service.). Here is a list of the animals that show up in the text. I hope I noted all of them:

butterfly, horse, wolf, lion, pig, snake, pigeon, bird, lynx, orioles, crow, oxen. Michael also uses the terms, "augury creatures" and "animal milk". Understanding the role and function of the animals that appear in the text certainly gives some insight into Michael's stance about labor and labor practice. The animals within this text seem to be struggling with the yoke of labor, "sweaters of the corpuscle, twain labor, the lynx heads dazzle" (p.63). Sovereignty (as social system) strips animals and humans of their autonomy and the object of their labor legislates existence within the stress of an ecologic surround. Taylor's statement that, "the lexeme of these poems' measure lives in the imagination as both word-unit and law-unit." is very helpful in working through the conceptual basis of Michael's book as it presents this fraught animalhuman cultural continuum. Animals are the first to be rejected from "the commons".

The sequence called 'Sacred' is violent and bloody. Within these pages, animals undergo forms of abject suffering (and submission as Thom points out). "black resin LAW in each slit has an animal upright, lash against the Ister, all/whilst warrant the monarch's cairn, 'his' trestle (1765-1837) vantage for the pigeon/". The law creates the conditions for domestication: to be broken in, trained, disciplined, tamed and made docile because the law is consequence, judgement, punishment and reward. The law also negotiates status, class and position within the system. This rather menacing historical trajectory is culture's highway. Michael references Herodotus' The Histories (not sure if I'm correct here) when Xerxes invades Greece—this quote I found fits right in with Michael's text: "Seest thou how God with his lightning smites always the bigger animals, and will not suffer them to wax insolent, while those of a lesser bulk chafe him not? How likewise his bolts fall ever on the highest houses and the tallest trees? So plainly does He love to bring down everything that exalts itself."

Labor bears the weight of heavy cultural inscription when tracked through history—a longue durée. And, then I had to ask, do animals labor? Can labor (as a conceptual term) be applied to non-human animals? I came to the conclusion that animals survive. Labor is a term that comes forth on the grounds of the implementation of a monetary system and laws—an enforced set of terms and a performed set of roles dictated by humans. I don't consider subsistence to be labor, quite. Animals under human control labor when they are relegated to the same designations and roles that the human body is placed in.

"The meadow in the throat" may relate to this switch from subsistence living to a laboring force that creates surplus (wealth) as its goal. Where the commons is subsumed into the body. Where the meadow is subordinate to the throat which calls the commands. Where human presencing and control over ecological function becomes the case. Subsistence living would better relate as "the throat in the meadow"—Michael is signaling this displacement. Jamie, I'm still processing all that you offered up with "the concept of utilitarian labor and its assumed goals within a (now "late") capitalist economy. Moving past the "thought of" to the "event" – even as the "event" is marked by a kind of figuration, all ties into the shapeshifting nature of the body's engaging in (becoming through) exercision. Muscle constriction (is the "field" or "meadow" created in the throat? or a "field poetics" that pastoralizes, breaks open conception?) enacts a labor of the throat, and sounding becomes an exercise, an attempt to render an immediacy." I want so much for this to be the case, that muscles offer up flexibility so that the body can break out of the biopolitical jam it finds itself in. We are certainly all

trying to engender various embodied modes through our somatic engagements that contend with the legacy of the body's conscription as tool and as creator of surplus valuation. The psychosomatic agitation in Michael's work initiates a struggle, resistance and activism around the body as it participates in labor.

I'm trying hard to accept "animal communism" as Thom describes it because I just can't resolve the fact that it is always the human negotiating the whip or the law. Symbiosis takes place between the herder and the herd, but finally it is the herd that dies at the herder's hand. The pastoral, after all, represents humans harnessing natural resource, idvllic as it all seems in comparison with our contemporary engagement: a mechanized worldview of biogenetic fields and frankenanimals. This is one stumbling block to a working idea of a commonsbecause if the commons doesn't include animal equity it isn't quite a commons. Federici again, "Capitalism also attempts to overcome our "natural state," by breaking the barriers of nature and by lengthening the working day beyond the limits set by the sun, the seasonal cycles, and the body itself, as constituted in pre-industrial society." CATW, p. 135. Civilization is where nothing "natural" takes place-all is always already culturally inscribed. "the meadow in the throat of red-vinyl wolves licking the Open's wound as it withdrawals/the stilling of its image..." These unresolved contridicitons are the basis of the term 'animal', therefore 'animal' and 'human' are unstable terms that continually falter. Michael opens the penultimate section of the book, 'Throne' with an epigram by Duncan that speaks to the stressed and overloaded state of the human-animal conundrum that is configured by the law: Will you drive me to madness only there to know me? vomiting images into the place of the Law?"

As animals are hoisted higher up the hierarchial line their actual numbers get scarcer these are the animals of the hunt and of conquest. It is difficult to breed these animals in captivity. The pastoral represents human's gradual harnessing of nature through husbandry and domestication The body becomes to be viewed as flesh (abstracted) and flesh as food source the body is then subdivided into function and form through codification. This must be where 'the sovereign' and 'the initiate' tie in and I read what you wrote, CJ with great interest, your points about ritual as it is inscribed/erased/described' in this work (and Duncan's). "of the wolf and fawn; how the king's two bodies still a center of consensus". A discussion of sovereignty and what this means of and for the animal. Animal comes from the Latin word 'animalis' meaning 'with soul' from 'anima', 'soul'. The symbolism of the animal is a severance from ground and groundedness. I was struck by this statement on the Wikipedia site: "Most animals are motile, meaning they can move spontaneously and independently." This is not the case for most domesticated animals!

I thought that the commons would be represented by the vernacular—language usage that falls outside of codes of correctness and attention to grammatical rule—unruly and problematic perhaps. I think Michael is challenging the effects of the law/legislation by messing with rarified, antiquated language through the mixing and splicing he does. Spasmodic animal flexibility outside of the jurisdictions of commerse and the law. "how I speak for a posse/ is steam purls, that that's my word/sways a bevy whom light, stag,/and motionless wedge this felted not yes/…" Which speaks to and echoes Deleuze and Guattari's statement: "The effectuation of a power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel." Which

also makes me think of Dennis Oppenheim's, "content is easy...But form, that's another animal." Getting at the heart of the symbolic animal is to finally encounter the human-animal in all our guises.

ThomDonovan<wildhorsesoffire@gmail.com>Fri,Oct1,2010at5:35PMTo:Brenda@yoyolabs. com Cc: CJ Martin <cm49600@gmail.com>, jamie townsend <greybridge@gmail.com>, Kyle Schlesinger <kyle@email.com>

I remember having this conversation with Kyle [Schlesinger] at some point, regarding "what happened" at Buffalo. Which is to say, what was orienting us and our peers when we were there as students between 2000-2007 (I left in 2005 but Kyle stayed on until summer of 2007). I think one of the main points of overlap between a lot of our practices—both as poets, scholars, and printers/book makers—which were of course inchoate at the time (and in many ways still are) was a shared sense of labor. That, specifically, what we made should be wrought, if not barely scrutable in its condensery. Michael, more than perhaps anyone, really embodied this commitment. Surely no one was as athletic as him, nor did anyone frame his athleticism so much as he did through his various modes of cultural production and public performance.

In this regard, I think Objectivism really oriented all of us, along with the practices of other scholar-poets. I have already mentioned Zukofsky's condensery, though Oppen's and Niedecker's were probably just as important. I see Duncan being most important in terms of his prose, and his reading practice cum vortex-like "ear." In terms of Michael, I know he was also backchanneling through 18th century poetry, Milton in particular, who of course partially gives us what we now know historically as radical Protestantism, and who in his day mediated on the spiritual and material gravity of sovereignty/regicide. Michael shares a lot in common with the Susan Howe of The Nonconformist Memorial, actually, in which the space of the poem and its conflictual historical-anarchival textures become a site for contested sovereignties, a contest redolent with a type of radical Protestantism. This is partially where I think Michael may get his use of an archaic vocabulary and diction, an idiom Brenda rightly cites for a strange kind of leveling effect. The language is indeed anachronistic, drawing upon a vernacular of Rap music and other contemporary English language forms, but also obviously on more ancient sources. One way to think about the language is hieroglyphically; another way is in terms of documentary—Michael's uses of language concretizing the recontextualization of words and phrases from a reading practice that has sent one with backward glances to the books of a New American Poetics discourse. What I am describing is obviously a legacy at Buffalo as well: from Olson through Howe and Bernstein through their many, and disparate, students.

I just finished writing this series of notes on contemporary poetries and Rap prosody for Jamie's Con/Crescent. Something that comes up there—and which I think Brenda is also addressing via somatics in regards to biopolitical resistance—is this sense that a Rap prosody may involve a radical sense of dialogism and situation of performer in relation to performed and performed to. Could we read Michael's poems as scores? Sometimes the poems themselves are difficult

to read on the page—there is a lot of room to maneuver, and thus to also err. When Michael reads his poems he tends to be breathy and to speak too closely into the mic (so that there is distortion). The posture he assumes is also somewhat like a rapper (or what one associates with Rap poses and gesture). This kind of elocution (for lack of a better term) scores the body's materiality in relation to the materiality of the poem as a kind of score. At the same time, unlike a Rap act, Michael's work rarely breaks the fourth wall. One listens, and the act of listening is meant to involve a kind of disclosure, a presence or recognition. The poem, while mediated by construction, is also structured by the need to provide a feeling for "truth."

Possibly this gets at what CJ is calling "mysticism," but may be more accurately described as a structure of feeling which prioritizes "truth," "presence," and "concealment"—terms native to Heidegger, who also forms an important background to Michael's reading practice. CJ writes: "This might be part of what Cross seeks to confront: in *Haecceities*, language is labor, not belief." What I wonder is if belief and labor (as conditions or practices) are related? One is asked, to a certain extent, to **believe** in Michael's project; though the proof of this belief may be in collaboration—the way we re/produce a structure of disclosure and recognition; the way we are given to these works by way of a kind of initiation or ritual (sans religion or belief-system).

The issues CJ is pointing to in regards to Michael's work. I think are also foregrounded in John Taggart, whose "Unveiling Marianne Moore" Michael spent a good deal of time designing for publication. In Taggart's work, the voice (his own "throat in the meadow"?—here citing Brenda's inversion of Michael's phrase) is the site of subjection (where one is subjected, but also whereby one *subjects*). The subject of Taggart's work on the one hand is "[perfectly] obedient" (Taggart's phrase), and through this obedience gains their freedom; the subject of Taggart's work is also a creature constantly in risk of defacement, harm, abandonment; a kind of spiritual (if not bodily) annihilation. As the singer Abbey Lincoln says in regards to her 1963 collaboration with Max Roach, Triptych: "It's holy work and it's dangerous not to know that 'cause you could die like an animal down here." "Holy work" may refer to the subjection of the voice/subject involved in the wagering of one's freedom. It is the meadow in the throat and the throat in the meadow, simultaneously. It is the Open, a figure which also appears through Michael's book, and which derives from a discourse around Heidegger and the animal (see Agamben's *The Open*). To be in the open, as I understand it, is to have attained a kind of freedom, a freedom which comes at the cost of vulnerability and submission to a physics of power. It is telling that Michael's current blog is called *The Disinhibitor*, since disinhibitors refer to phenomena among human/animals which disrupt regimented and/or habitual behavior patterns. Alcohol and other controlled substances act as disinhibitors for human/animals. So does any chemical interaction that distracts (or detracts?) the human/animal from its "ring." Emerson's "circles" of sepiturnal forgetfulness? Howe's "enthusiasm"? Taggart's "standing wave" breaking in "perfect obedience"? I think we can relate these familiar literary tropes to Michael's own sense of disinhibition in its relation to the Open. It is also related to Jamie's quotation about Mark E. Smith, that "he liked Captain Beefheart so much because [Beefheart] was 'freeform with discipline''' Discipline = ring; freeform = open? This tension (or pressure) which may produce our freedom may also have to do with Michael's interest in a certain

kind of visual art practice (Michael Eiseman's *House IV* is cited, and I know Michael was also referring to Rachel Whiteread's mould-like structures in "Sacred"). Ekphrasis—the way Michael is engaging visual art—would also be an interesting way to approach this book, since certain art practices may allegorize (or simply orient, like a guide) his own sense of freedom being produced out of cultural production—especially when the production process is labor intensive or puts the practitioner in bodily harm (as in the case of Serra's heroic sculptures, or Matthew Barney who, after the Body Art of the 70s, uses his own body as a sculptural material. One of my first interactions, BTW, with Michael was exchanging with him about Barney's *Cremaster* films for a paper he was writing for the *Rereading Bottom* symposium at Buffalo in fall of 2003—Michael's first semester as a student at Buffalo!).

In terms of a future anterior (@Jamie), the future anterior refers to *what will have been*. It is what we do now—impossibly—to produce com/possible futures. Michael's own sense of freedom opening up through the poem—of the poem being likened to a structure of "event" (Badiou) or "coappearing" (Nancy) has to do with the future anterior as a project shared among a current discourse about poetry in regards to social action and responsibility. I think the future anterior is also related through a particular notion of ontology that views the future as not foreclosed, but constantly wagered through our present actions. The future is a disaster, as such. And Michael's "white eschatology" (a term he cites after Benjamin, which refers to a time outside of time, a remainder or *aufhebung* of chronos) points to the ontology that his poetry wagers.

I know this post is kind of long, but I just wanted to point to one more thing that I have always felt an affinity with in Michael's book, and this is his use of the term "grace." What is grace but the body given to obedience, habit, worldlessness? One associates (or at least Stein did) grace with nuns, with a life of withdrawal, of resignation and renunciation. Kleist relates grace through mechanistic forces, but also through the animal. The bear who he evokes at the end of On the Marionette Theater, is graceful because it has instincts which can deflect any blow; likewise, the marionette is graceful because its center(s) of gravity are elsewhere, in forces beyond its own agency, its will or intention. This is hard to articulate-maybe it will even seem mystical— though I hope not. I think that I relate Michael's own sense of grace through his habit, and the way he thinks about habit as being involved with labor and effort (animal subsistence as Brenda says; Hannah Arendt actually discusses "labor" as having to do with non-reproductive effort vs. "work" which produces a surplus). Labor is thus a kind of "good unto itself." It is an act of faith and belief (against cynicism and skepticism). When I was in Vancouver a young woman who does some very difficult social service ---she assists the very poor and, in some cases, criminal with housing-told me that she thought that labor was a crime. Certain labor practices are no doubt criminal; and the glorification of a Protestant work ethic is certainly one of most destructive ethos of US/European culture. Yet I cannot see labor as essentially "bad" or "criminal." And I think labor (or work) at its best may offer us a connection to what is most essential about our being, our bodies, their potential for sociality and mutual wealth. Maybe this is what Michael is getting at through his use of the term grace. Grace as what we feel or touch when we affirm that aspect of our animal being which requires subsistence. Can the poem be subsistent? Can it be, in other words, necessary? It would be interesting to think about poetry, which would seem a luxury or pure expenditure, as in fact something which we cannot live without. Williams phrase comes to mind: "It is difficult to get the news from poems, yet men die miserably every day for lack of what is found there." Williams' view of poetry here echoes Pound's notion that poetry is "news that stays news"; yet I would be interested in taking literally the idea that one can die from a lack of what is (or can be) found in poetry. Similar tropes of subsistence (or survival) permeate American poetics in particular, from Colonial tales of "wilderness," to Dickinson and Olson and Howe. And this lineage also concerns our freedom; our freedom to forage in those wastes of language and shared material conditions which Taylor is referring to. Poetry as an extension of our lived conditions of commoning and usufruct. Poetry, in other words, as useful—not merely an expenditure, a pure wastefulness (though much of poetry is wasteful too).

Thom Donovan <wildhorsesoffire@gmail.com> Fri, Oct 1, 2010 at 7:01 PM To: CJ Martin <cm49600@gmail.com> Cc: Brenda@yoyolabs.com, jamie townsend <greybridge@gmail.com>, Kyle Schlesinger <kyle@email.com>

One more thing that occurred to me, in regards to the group composition of the review at this point and to my most recent post. I think that David Brazil would have a thing or two to say about Michael's book which could really contribute a lot. Especially in terms of the discourse I am talking about—grace and the Open and all that. If it is not to late and if we don't mind the review being long it may be interesting to invite him along for the ride, compiling our responses so far so we can send them to him...—Thom

**Brenda Iijima <brenda@yoyolabs.com> Sat, Oct 2, 2010 at 10:37** AM Reply-To: Brenda@yoyolabs.com To: Thom Donovan <wildhorsesoffire@gmail.com>, CJ Martin <cm49600@gmail.com> Cc: jamie townsend <greybridge@gmail.com>, Kyle Schlesinger <kyle@email.com>

I'm all for bringing David into the conversation—great idea. Thom, your latest offering here is such a resonant tapestry of ideation. I'm needing to hole up for a while and to study what you've brought forth. Tremendous all around. In awe, Brenda

CJ Martin <cm49600@gmail.com> Sat, Oct 2, 2010 at 10:50 AM To: Brenda@yoyolabs.com Cc: Thom Donovan <wildhorsesoffire@gmail.com>, jamie townsend <greybridge@gmail.com>, Kyle Schlesinger <kyle@email.com>, DZ Brazil <dzbrazil@yahoo.com>

Second that! & now that the discussion has legs all around, it shouldn't be too big a deal to welcome another person in. Will cc David here: David, if you can't you read the whole conversation below, I've attached a pdf of what's been said thus far (some OT bits here and

there as the thing got going). Interested in coming along for the ride?

**DZ Brazil <dzbrazil@yahoo.com> Sat, Oct 2, 2010 at 4:29 PM** To: CJ Martin <cm49600@gmail. com>, Brenda@yoyolabs.com Cc: Thom Donovan <wildhorsesoffire@gmail.com>, jamie townsend <greybridge@gmail.com>, Kyle Schlesinger <kyle@email.com>

hey everyone ----

cool batch ! (i read the preceding proceedings on my lunch break ...)

i'll endeavor to draft something worth circulating over the next few days — & thanks for inviting me to join the choir !

love — david

DZ Brazil <dzbrazil@yahoo.com> Mon, Oct 4, 2010 at 5:11 PM To: Brenda Iijima <br/> <

dear friends ----

i'm not sure how to proceed textually in my response / contribution except by way of a sort of mode of "scattered speculations," so i'll just jump in that way —

starting with the overall title, *haeccities*, which gives us a very overdetermined clue to the whole project. the technical scholastic term, coined by duns scotus (& in distinction, i reckon, to aquinas' "quiddity") is built on the latin demonstrative and therefore is best translated "thisnesses" — the singular instantiations by which whatever transcendent form is known.

the route leads from duns scotus to his recuperation by deleuze (in"difference & repetition") through the very crucial channel of gerard manley hopkins, who averred that he preferred duns scotus to aquinas (in, i believe, a letter to robert bridges?) (doctrinally problematic given his religious associations), who wrote a poem called "duns scotus' oxford," & who illustrates the doctrine of haeccity in "as kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame" — "for Christ plays in ten thousand places,/Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his/To the Father through the features of men's faces."

those of us who know michael & have heard him say this word, know that he pronounces it "hex-ities" — emphasis on the *hex* — as though its ontological singularity were at one and the same time a curse — an antinomy in the name that i think travels through many of his titles & which reminds me of hegel's remarks on "sublation" in the science of logic :

The two definitions of 'to sublate' which we have given can be quoted as two dictionary *meanings* of this word. But it is certainly remarkable to find that a language has come to use

one and the same word for two opposite meanings. It is a delight to speculative thought to find in the language words which have in themselves a speculative meaning; the German language has a number of such.

i hear such resonances in *cede* (/seed), *throne*(/thrown, with the resonance of the heideggerian geworfenheit), and probably in one way or another in most of the titles of these pieces.

so, there, for prolegomenon, in any case ----

& hoping this finds everyone very well ----

love — david

**CJ Martin <cm49600@gmail.com>Thu, Oct7, 2010 at 1:41 PM** To: DZ Brazil <dzbrazil@yahoo. com> Cc: Brenda Iijima <brenda@yoyolabs.com>, Thom Donovan <wildhorsesoffire@gmail. com>, jamie townsend <greybridge@gmail.com>, Kyle Schlesinger <kyle@email.com>

Hi everyone:

One thing that might be useful at this point is to note the variety of reading strategies deployed thus far, which include close readings, prosodic analysis, inter-textual flights, shared personal histories, etymologies, even counting. I list these here partly as an aid to new readers, but also as a way of returning to the question of initiation in (our reading of) *Haecceities*. Thom, something you said in your last post prompts me to linger there a bit: "One is asked, to a certain extent, to **believe** in Michael's project; though the proof of this belief may be in collaboration—the way we re/produce a structure of disclosure and recognition; the way we are given to these works by way of a kind of initiation or ritual (sans religion or belief system)." It's funny, because in one way I can understand this as the equivalent of giving oneself over to the music of a live performance—that we respond by dancing, by moving, that this kind of collaboration is affirmative, and that initiation in this case doesn't really come at too great a cost. And yet in another sense what you describe is something I suspect many readers will chafe at (for better or worse) —to contemporary audiences, the notion of reading in/as worship (even "sans religion or belief system") might seem as anachronistic as some of the most antique turns of Michael's phrasing.

To that end, I wonder if we might double back on a few things, as time permits:

First, since it's been mentioned a few times here already, I wonder if someone could establish more directly what connection there is between the poems in this book and rap, maybe even trace out a particular locale w/in that immense field where there's a confluence. I'm really interested to hear how that particular thread opens up Michael's work for those of you who make sense of it, because I actually have a hard time understanding the relation in many ways.

Thom, I perked up hearing you read through to Michael's relationship to the plastic and performance arts, and I think it'd be useful for us to hear more on this if you're interested in expanding, particularly as a way of understanding Michael's work as ekphrasis.

Brenda, your post was so amazingly acrobatic that I find myself just wanting to tune in for more. I wondered if you might want to follow up on your response to Jamie's discussion of muscle constriction and sounding a field, where you write, "I want so much for this to be the case, that muscles offer up flexibility so that the body can break out of the biopolitical jam it finds itself in." I register a disappointment in your response—that you *want* to believe but can't, maybe. If possible, I wonder if you might say more about dance/movement in/as biopolitical trouble, possibly in relation to the prevalent visceral bindings in *Haecceities* (the book ends: "browstress the wide island meadow / bound by the entrails of son" 89).

David, I love your pointing us to the *doublings* of "hex-ities"! Here's another double, to work back through to Jamie's sense that "muscle constriction [...] enacts a labor of the throat": "stop the invocation say / metre is a cinch hon" (15). So, meter's an ease, it's easy—but it's also produced in a *binding* act, which doubles again, in my reading, as both a description of the act of production *and* a gloss on the contractual terms of reading meter. To me, this (double) binding's a trouble of initiation, touching back on the faith that might be required of a reading, as the *cost* of reading. The section in full reads

a hand on the air came calm traffic way the air came calm sleeved sez conduce the men hold eyen wept metal vat sez boss stop the invocation say metre is a cinch hon (15)

Thom, your last post treated faith at length, and gorgeously. I'm *moved* by your framing of Michael's work through a reading of grace, but at the same time something in me hesitates to fully give myself over to the terms, especially with lines like the above in mind. I'm a little terrified by the "hand on the air," the sense that it comes for those caught in the machinery. I wonder, given what a cinch meter is, if we might filter Williams' faith in the political necessity of poetry (which you note) through his question in *Paterson*: "How much does it cost / to love the locust tree / in bloom?" The question comes in part one of book three, "The Library," and I think in some way it speaks to this notion of giving oneself over to a reading—that reading involves a kind of sacrifice or death to oneself, a binding of oneself. I thought your nod to Williams was fully apropos of "The Pales" in particular, which ends with the meadow ablaze—not unlike WCW's library—in a "mighty pyre" (21). Though it's the "cherry bloom" and not the locust tree that burns in Michael's poem, somehow I don't think the relation's incidental. So I wonder if "The Pales" might be read as troubling the notion that bodies in biopolitical trouble should be expected to proceed on faith, to incur the "heavy cost" of a reading?

It's partly out of the pairing of some of the responses here that this comes into sharper focus for me, particularly where "The Pales" is concerned. Thom's sense that Michael works the condensery, producing poems that seek to be "wrought, if not barely scrutable;" coming as it does on the heels of Brenda's working through of the delineations of labor and privilege via the codification of flesh in the pastoral: "The pastoral represents human's gradual harnessing of nature through husbandry and domestication so that the body is viewed as flesh and flesh is food source—the body is then subdivided into function and form through codification." This is where I think I register the threat in Michael's work regarding initiation: that somehow *Haecceities* engages the condensery as more literally machinic, tuned toward the codification of bodies in economic labor, which prevents me from compartmentalizing or understanding as benign my own participation in a reading or writing of the condensery. If the work engages a commons, it does so with that threat in hand (or *as* the hand that comes for us "on the air"), as a kind of warning against too uncontested a relationship to the discourses thereof, a reminder of how parasitic those ritual remnants can be. At least this is coming to be my sense of it in our discussion.

Apologies if I've hovered too far aloft of the poems here. In my next post, I want to approach a closer reading of *Haecceities*, to proceed in disbelief, to *prove* a reading of this work, as it were—not because I doubt the work, but because I know it, or know an experience of it, and want to account for that. In particular I'd like to engage the sonic life of this book. It's obvious from the legion of epigraphs collected in *Haecceities* that part of the project is to work the interstices of poetry and/as thought, but these poems percuss as much as they theorize, apart from or in tandem with what they theorize, and this functions as a sort of contracted action, a sonic appendage where I find the bulk of my pleasure here. Back of my thinking is Mackey's sense of sound as phantom limb—Michael's work thickens in a sonic space, more than in the space of argument, at least for me. I can't, as a reader, presume to be able to work out at every turn what these poems *mean*, since that meaning isn't exactly what I pursue in my reading, but I think I can speak for what they *do*, and I don't want to waste an opportunity to convey a sense of this.

I also want to return to the Hopkins thread (which I was glad to hear David take up), since this contracted action is another site where Michael's work and Hopkins' keep company. So much criticism on Hopkins traces a theology, and while I wouldn't at all call this a misguided approach, what I want is an accounting not of the content, not of the doctrine of his faith, but the *motion* thereof, as a labor that itself affirms the faith, that exercises more than expresses (to return to the Adorno epigraph re labor and communication, to Jamie's notion of sounding a field)—an uncannily singular labor that rigorously courts the hermetic in its relationship to sound. As Jamie puts it, "sounding becomes an exercise, an attempt to render an immediacy." My hunch is that this compounds the problems of met by readers new to Michael's work, so if it isn't too brute a maneuver, I'd like to hazard an approach or two (on the other side of a stack of papers, that is).

More in a bit-CJ

**DZ Brazil <dzbrazil@yahoo.com>Thu, Oct 7, 2010 at 4:36 PM** To: CJ Martin <cm49600@gmail. com> Cc: Brenda Iijima <brenda@yoyolabs.com>, Thom Donovan <wildhorsesoffire@gmail.

com>, jamie townsend <greybridge@gmail.com>, Kyle Schlesinger <kyle@email.com>

hello friends !

once more very glad to be in the loop of conversation around this book, with such esteemed interlocutors — & with thanks to chris for his synthesis-to- path — the calque from which i'll depart —

along the lines of the reading of the title as a "trembling emblem" (ED) or allegorical metonymy, i think it's worth reading the striking cover image. it's a detail from a durer engraving, but absent context i dont think it's possible to know that, unless you're erwin panofsky. it depicts a shrouded figure, whose features are invisible but whose form is clear (a standing person — or *colossus* ? (cf. epigraph to "plinth course," from derrida, pg. 23 : "A colossus, rather, a certain kolossos which erects itself as measure. ["s'erige en mesure" : also, "rises up in time" (in the musical sense of "in time")."

what do i get out of this? first, an oblique way into my registration of michael's musical debts, which i read as not primarily to rap but to *metal* — the virtuosity, the strangeness, the re-appropriation, even the kitsch. that we may not know that the image is derived from durer does not deprive us of the faculty to feel its *tone*. likewise, even without detail of feature, we perceive a mass, a form, which continues to be articulate even though the veil renders it negated, inoperative, *sous rature* — crossed out, if you will.

so, negated forms still deployed & still effective in the space of their negation. this is an attempt to say something about how i understand michael's art of citation & allusion. and also a way to approach the vexed questions already addressed, around the cluster of problems that go under the name of religious or theological.

once more metal seems like a useful lead here — it tends to appropriate what *works*, in a deleuzean sense ("not, *what does it mean* ? but, *how does it work* ?), to wit, the diverse signifiers of satanism & the esoteric tradition more generally, unmoored from their historical determination but not less efficacious for that (and after all, the western esoteric tradition from which metal draws is already a sort of syncretic ahistoricism — so it's the unmooring of the unmooring). i perceive a connection here also to the discourse of the *cosmetic* that chris has been working out — if these forms are a sort of libidinally charged wreckage, they have a power derived from that which is separable from whatever doctrinal history — & may even turn out to be the *unocculted form* of that doctrinal history — pure shaped affect known as such, in the space of its inoperativity (within, say, a particular religious discourse).

the colossus / *kolossos* of the cover & the derrida citation takes us also into the aesthetic discourse — & into the epigraphs ! firstly, i know that michael's doctoral work involved an intensive reading of the classic texts in the discourse of continental aesthetics, from kant's third critique through hegel, adorno, & derrida's *truth in painting*, from which the epigraph above is (i believe) taken, and which is also a source for (or one potential source for) language that shows up in a lot of these sequences. ("here the Tlingit coffin," [55], for example — from the section entitled "Cartouches"). a number of other epigraphs are from philosophical texts : adorno's *aesthetic theory*, heidegger's "origin of the work of art," kojeve's *introduction to the* 

*reading of hegel*, bataille's *theory of religion*, kleinberg-levin's *gestures of ethical life* — and the juxtaposition here of aesthetics, dialectics, religious theory, & kleinberg-levin's book on "holderlin's question of measure" ("Is there measure on this earth? There is none.") brings us into a constellation where proposals regarding measure are both poetic / prosodic facts but also facts of our collective being, considered politically & theologically. ("have oaths evinced the metron still and still each sovereign rest despite the socius" [45])

concerning the question of "belief," greek *pistis* ("to not noncolor, *pistis* for love" [73]) is one of a number of deployments of transliterated greek in "throne." (including *thetic, sarx*. pneuma, anomos, charis — and, though it's not italicized, the "christ" (=christos, the anointed one, translating the aramaic *mashiach*)) — all arguably language around the discourse of paul, present in his letters & thematized in books by agamben & badiou, among others — the latter a likely source for the epigraphs around grace in "sacred". (charis, from which we derive our word "charisma," is the greek word in paul's letters which is usually translated "grace" — although a lot is hiding inside of that univocity of translation !) *pistis* is just as problematic to translate as *charis* — even though it's usually translated "belief" or "faith," that translation hides the novelty of the very transformation in belief- structures that christian faith represented — namely, that it was a sort of performative that one would *believe in* the christian teaching. there's an interesting book called (something like) christian faith and the greek rhetorical *tradition*, in which the author argues that the only precursor to the model of faith proposed by paul is something like the "faith in" the discourse of an orator — that we have been adequately persuaded. perhaps you will forgive my long discursus on this subject if i sum up by saying we can avoid a lot of the blind alleys of talking about "faith" by recognizing that, whatever else it may be, it happens in the human world as a rhetorical situation and a rhetorical transaction. (and governed therefore by oaths, rites, all the diverse protocols of binding & restricting ... "metre is a cinch hon" ...)

love — david

jamie townsend <greybridge@gmail.com> Fri, Oct 8, 2010 at 12:04 PM To: DZ Brazil <dzbrazil@yahoo.com>Cc:CJMartin<cm49600@gmail.com>,BrendaIijima<bre>brenda@yoyolabs.com>,Thom Donovan <wildhorsesoffire@gmail.com>,Kyle Schlesinger <kyle@email.com>

Hi all

So much to think about in these last several posts, and really great responses all around. CJ, I'm so glad you brought up the question of context, I think with 5 people reviewing 1 book its something very important for all of us to keep our eyes on. After this round of specifics I would like to step back a bit (from the brink) and consider points of entry in a more general way.

I want to extend a line out a little further from my previous thoughts and explore an (what is hopefully useful, or generative) aspect of Michael's work that for me (though some of the specific vocab he chooses to incorporate) seems to illuminate a lot meta-textual elements at play in Haecceities:

I want to explore a few ideas related to the vocabulary of *Haecceities* and the use of time throughout the book. Considering the question of "ritualistic" or "mystical" language, I think that Michael has done an admirable job of disinvesting these some of the terms from a sense of historical fixity; "slag against the asphalt" shares the same page with "whilst warrant the monarch's cairn" (Haecceities 59). I wholeheartedly agree Brenda (re: your statement on Bahktin) that this point of the text illuminates something essential about its unique internal sense of time and space as a marker (a cairn) that gets placed here, and I want to reinforce my feeling that this section of the text serves to note a fluctuation between historical time and coordinate time: images of stone rubble occurring through various temporal/associative permeations all at once. (This also makes me think about Derrida's "hauntological time", his exploration of Hamlet's "time out of joint" in Spectres of Marx; perhaps this may link up with Michael's rigorous studies of continental philosophy, thank you for tracing that line David!) To me SACRED, in particular reads as a layered, historical/social exploration through the aggregation of different art works. Picking up a thread from last time to me it immediately resembles much of Olson's writing, engaging with the contemporaneous present where points of seeming overlap reveal themselves to be holes through, perforations into, an opening place of synchronistic wholeness and absence. Taylor Brady's engaged backcover statement about Michael's work seems even more appropriate when considering his own writing that explores this topic: "Everything was always happening at the same time so we saw each other dead as often as alive, leaves blown to ash off trees blown down like shingles blasted from test-range houses in high-speed film studies..." (Microclimates 18); lexicography as open framework, a rhizomatic expanse, not power fixed or set down though sole regimented gesture/utterance.

To me this refiguring of time at play in the writing best illustrates the problem of focusing on assumed "mystical" qualities in a text like this, even though it at points "wardrobes itself" (as you put it in your first response CJ) in an archaic diction or assumes a quality of the incantatory or "religious" because of its dense sonic qualities. Instead of mysticism what I feel like Michael's aggregation of history/vocab more accurately enacts is an experience of "Scalapino's / event horizon" (*Haecceities* 65) and questions of apprehensive experience. I take "apprehension" (bare conception of a thing, divorced from judgment) from Leslie's critical appraisal of Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge and Richard Tuttle's Sphericity: "...when a point is silent, it's not a vantage point. Really there's not vantage point, and the instant of apprehension is solely. The event horizon's so loaded, the horizon's everywhere..." (The Public Word/Syntactically Impermanence 61). Michael creates a similar but unique effect by sounding this silent point - in the act of utterance his "meadow in the throat" (just as Duncan's Meadow is "as if an eternal pasture folded in all thought" ("Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow"; emphasis mine), language approaching a null-set in regards to bare representation) sounding the moment of apprehension honed to a condition of undelineated expansiveness, where the *event* is the *open*[ing]. The Spicer epigraph that serves as an opening to the book as a whole so effectively sets the scene for what plays out in each section (I think very importantly linked to the doubling you were speaking of in your last entry CJ) - that "he began to practice a new language" (after being born in the post office, a place of public dialogue and interchange) and that this new language had an effect of separation even as he perceived and "exercised" it. That Michael chooses to open the book with this difficulty, and that the invention of "politics" (the wielded power of a body of citizens, coming back to Olson's polis) would be the necessity to involve "persons" within this new speech, does reflect a certain sense of enclosure or hermeticism, but I also sense it as a journeying out into whatever new waters this language exists in. Will Alexander's poetry, particularly in *Exobiology as Goddess & Sri Lankan Loxodrome*, and its use of language as a state of sounding shifts, extra-dimensional flowerings, seems to me a natural companion to Spicer's quote here, as well as Spicer's partner quote at the book's opening, Carl Andre's graphing of the Hole.

I am very interested in Michael's use of the "abyss" and its relation to the event horizon. In response to the Carl Andre epigraph: "I would say a thing is a hole in a thing it is not", what would the abyss, literally a hole in everything, constitute? In relationship with Twombly's white-centric canvases (his use of white as foundational, his "marble") & this idea of the abyss, I am also thinking about Kasimir Malevich's *Black Square*, his painting of a solid black square centered on a white canvas. This work (as well as some of his other suprematist paintings, like White on White) presents Malevich's conception of the void's fullness, its "supreme feeling", and its potentiality to communicate something entirely new and non-objective. "The square = feeling, the white field = the void beyond this feeling" (Malevich - "Suprematism"). In astrophysics black holes gauge the inverse relationship between space/time and energy/matter, enacting a dialectic tension; as matter collapses into a black hole an entity of pure gravity is formed, but (theoretically, as postulated by Hawking) when a black hole evaporates, energy (in the form of radiation) emerges from the space/time curvature; what comes back is something new, a transformation returning from the void. Michael places us at a vantage point to this loaded event at several points within book, seemingly as though we are on (or observing) a series of planks that span it: "the coruscent figure, disport plumes and fife / as drops arranged the surface of the strake planks" (Haecceities 50) & "papered gold-gilt planks canvassed / what wound about the trestle of the void" (Haecceities 79). The visceral sound qualities of Haecceities also has me wondering – in moving from the initial experience of the pupil, a void that holds the process of sight, how could a rending of linear perception (space/time) at the point of event horizon play out in a purely auditory sense? Can something be brought back? Wherein the voice, the resonance, emerges from a hole (throat), space shifted into impressed, vibrational forms, sensory information that is watermarked onto the void. Is this resonance the trace of Badiou's event, an aftereffect, an echo? Brian Dillon uses the term "event horizon" in his write-up of Badiou's *Ethics*, where he describes the "event" as "a breach in calm chronology, a kind of temporal seizure" & "the unguessable arrival of something else" (FRIEZE #71).

Heidegger's "rift" and Twombly's frame around the absence also most immediately suggest the event's *horizon*, that border that marks the point of no return, the null-set. But that whiteness *could* carry something back to us, across the border, as if light could ignore conventional physics (could be meta-physical) and return to us from the hole's singularity (and in the same way a voice return from somewhere deep, unknown, and re- sound itself). Could the point at which proper time dilates (at the event horizon) signify this panoramic openness of both *sound and vision*? (I had to throw this in here because lately I've been realizing why this lyric has always stuck with me – I love how Bowie frames it: "waiting for the gift of..." and how

that framing speaks to some of the tension and movement in Michael's work – a response to something *received*). And, at the same time, is our experience of (or "fidelity" to) time's dilation exemplary of Badiou's conception for experiencing *Truth* as bearing witness to the unforeseen event? Waiting at the mind's end of linear history is the arrival of Twombly's "white eschatology" (Haecceities 64) – as the idea of a "colonized future" gives way to "the blank.....in the interest of another future" (Haecceities 62). Malevich states: "this desert is filled with the spirit of nonobjective sensation which pervades everything" ("Suprematism"). Malevich's attempt to completely eliminate the "thing" from his work in the pursuit of pure feeling doesn't entirely match up to Michael's project in its purely aesthetic scope, but this loss of metered time to the open sensate marks an important point of ontological shift, a new ability to experience and be illuminated as "Spirit's watted filament" (Haecceities 63). If the horizon is "everywhere" then the linearity of law is unbound (taking the Kleinburg-Levin epigraph to SACRED as a referent: "abyss is the poet's figure for the perpetual suspension of the right measure or law"). In the abyss complete potentiality can be a replacement for "right measure"; "purely formal void as anterior placeholder..." (Haecceities 62). re: Thom's future anterior: "what we do now—impossibly—to produce com/possible futures"; given the void and the feeling beyond the void-what could be.

I'm sorry if this round of notes is overly tangled or referentially dense beyond usefulness; I felt the pull of the Hole as I began to tease out my last series of reflections and I feel as though this text has, in some ways, compressed my scattered thoughts on this approach into a singularity. I've found that as I review my notation on Michael's work what I'm continually left trying to pin down is an *essence*; a consistent sense of struggling to find a place to stand in *Haecceities* as its labyrinthine form refuses to yield any singular statement of definition, or of judgment. A full void—that I am struck by in new ways each time I enter in.

Much peace -J

BrendaIijima<br/>brenda@yoyolabs.com>Fri,Oct22,2010at3:13PM<br/>Reply-To:Brenda@yoyolabs.<br/>com To: CJ Martin <cm49600@gmail.com> Cc: Thom Donovan <wildhorsesoffire@gmail.com>,<br/>DZ Brazil <dzbrazil@yahoo.com>, jamie townsend <greybridge@gmail.com>, Kyle Schlesinger <kyle@email.com>

Ok—I'm back! I had to pour a bucket of water over my head and sit quietly for a week (well, more than that), synthesizing all of your thoughts and letting passions dissipate. Thanks CJ for your incredible last contribution, so generous of you to weigh in on all of our calibrations and suggest vital cues for engagement. Thanks also to David for interjecting a fascinating speculative-fractal image of the reading you undertook of Haecceities. If time permits, it seems necessary at some point to unpack Heidegger's ideas of geworfenheit in regards to Haecceities. David, I hope you take us there. Thom, I wonder if you'd discuss grace and faith in further detail. Jamie, I can't wait to read your on-going thoughts and digressions!

One last thought that I intended to add about the dilemmas animals presently face is extrapolated

from Stephen M. Myers' book, The End of the Wild, where he states, "A great many of the plants and animals we perceive as healthy and plentiful today are in fact relics and ghosts. This seeming contradiction is explained by the fact that species loss is not a simple linear process." This quote from Meyer is important because it illustrates how the survival of non-human animals now depends on their relationship with humans. Animals that have a symbiotic relationship with humans are thriving, or at least, allowed to proliferate, even if the end "result" is that they become food for humans (and other animals), (are made into) commercial products, pets (this is a very contentious subject!), become the bodies subject to medical experimentation, pests designated for eradication, etc. In order for non-human animals to survive they have to labor for humans and are also subject to human law, because the law legislates their bodies. In Michael's work animals appear as hovering specters (but not as simulacra); their presence flickers amidst the detritus of history: a clutter of cues and clues—ideological, social, ethical, sensory, environmental, racial, and sexual. It is as if the animal is a residual presence. What CJ mentioned about phantom limbs applies here too. Michael in several instances equates the animal with lawlessness.

Maybe we've really entered the postanimal phase of history, not, as has been previously theorized, the post-human (which aims to return humans to a more equitable position amongst species while simultaneously relinquishing the body to technology as we partner up with machines evermore, see the work of Sherry Turkle—bots are people too, or are programs that replicate human personality). Foucault postulates that bare life is a return to the animal, but I'm not convinced by this entirely. Bare life is an approximation of animal, asking the animal to again act as metaphor, miring this conceptualization with anthropomorphism. This is murky territory because humans are animals but distance themselves from such terms. It is the same disbelief that helped slavery and racial hatred flourish when a culture creates ludicrous categories such as human, subhuman and animal. Postanimal could propose a feral ulterior, a concept my friend J/J Hastain came up with.

I'd like to engage more specifically with the notion of human labor as it appears throughout Haecceities, starting with a concept Michael inserts in "CEDE", namely, "entelechy". "In German idealism, entelechy may denote a force propelling one to self-fulfillment. The concept had occupied a central position in the metaphysics of Leibnez and is closely related to his monadology in the sense that each sentient entity contains its own entire universe within it" according to Wikipedia. The capitalist liberal ideal is for labor to create the means of selffulfillment, however illusionary this self-fulfillment is. Maybe Michael's imbedded point is that "thisness" has overwhelmed and occluded presence, the presence of being-or it could be the flip side, that thisness (presence itself) has given the illusion of stabile subjectivity but this illusion has imploded and we are left with shimmering fragments. The image doesn't fit back together like a puzzle might, instead there are divots abounding: aporias, holes, negative feedback, a kind of null and void, a materiality that is null and void—a riddle instead of a puzzle. The rejection of presence amounts to the rejection of futurity, foreclosing that which is not entropic. And, adding to this Agamben speculates that "processes of subjectivization bring the individual to bind himself to his own identity and consciousness and, at the same time, to an external power. Identity and consciousness is shaped by this external power to such an

extent that an internal impetuous no longer exists, or just barely." It still feels subjective but that's where the illusion creeps in. Agamben again: "It can even be said that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power". Identity is tied so intimately to the needs and insistences of the capitalist system—our frantic, overworked, undernourished (because the soil of the industrial farm is spent), medicalized bodies scramble to keep up with the proliferation of expendable technologies, our sense of ability is increasingly locked into prosthetic devices. Robotic arms take over assembly labor; mental commitment robots emanate empathetic utterances at our nursing home bedsides. These are observations I'm making, not judgements.

Haecceities presents a world on the cusp of posthumanism before capitulation takes place. One picks up a vein of reverie for the sheer beauty of the language, but what I really feel are tiny alarm bells ringing in the lexicon. Thisness and whatness are in contest. The dissonant shuffling of anachronistic samples creates prismatic vision and a cacophonous bellwether. This phrasing is like a pile of off-shavings from a sculpture that's been carved. A negative form in one context, positive in another—not opposites, pieces of the composition dismantled/ disturbed. Or like the double-sidedness Agamben describes: "It is almost if, starting from a certain point, every decisive political event were double-sided: the spaces, the liberties, and the rights won by individuals in their conflicts with central powers always simultaneously prepared a tacit but increasing inscription of individuals' lives within the state order, thus offering a new and more dreadful foundation for the very sovereign power from which they wanted to liberate themselves. (p.121 Homo Sacer). This work is shaking the yoke!

'Plinth Course' shares a glimmer of sensual pleasure, though there are forces at play such as constraints, mechanical interventions and emotional failures caused by overarching systems intervening. The beloved appears as an armature, as ghostly revenant, as "a prurient first – drawn nude drawn nude in blood on the grey tarp", "a louche figure on the ground (is this the beloved?)—amidst garishness, taciturn, onericish, morass, mammal white, "pleaser's silk cantle traps the face".

Returning to Jamie's discussion of muscle constriction and sounding a field and your follow up question CJ—I think we've reached a juncture where it is understood that mechanization is replacing meaning. Even if this is not the case in reality, it is a powerful ideological tool and causes homeopathy, holism, the vadic and somatics to be viewed with contempt. Society looks for the technological fix when the local, ecologically sensitive approach is there all around us. Silvia Federici's important research that unravels how bodies have been shaped to be docile and disciplined for capitalist production—as she says, "the fixation of the body in space and time, that is, the individual's spatio-temporal identification, is an essential condition for the regularity of the work-process. (p. 143)

At work, in our labors we perform repetitive specialized acts. This constriction causes atrophy and a diminished sense of what experience the body is. I'm personally endeavoring to understand if the body can break out of these mode pressed on to our bodies by an industrialmilitary complex that loves monotheism. One approach is to question what normative gesture looks like and interact spasmodically in zones of contact. A fitful, spasmodic body engagement seems to unleash energies that have not been domesticated or mannered. There is a very fine line between going through the motions propelled by a body calibrated by the accumulation of acculturated modes of behavior and the body that is breathing awareness and opening up to the temporary embarrassment of leaving that zone for expressions that are unruly, unknown and empathetic, etc. To work through mistranslations of the body. How else to counteract the prevalent low-level (read barely acceptable: something society bares, doesn't speak out) racism, sexism and classism that exists in each micro gesture? There is a generative, volatile energy in Michael's lines, "a hand at degrees against the ribs—hock or tarsus, knee or stifle, brisket, feathering/ this is a grid according to length and breadth, mantled against the ribcage/opens out munitions piece—the flank I counter, munitions in pantone grays/presumably liters of blood wet the pavement, pierce..."

Thom Donovan <wildhorsesoffire@gmail.com> Tue, Oct 26, 2010 at 6:23 PM To: CJ Martin <cm49600@gmail.com> Cc: Brenda@yoyolabs.com, DZ Brazil <dzbrazil@yahoo.com>, jamie townsend <greybridge@gmail.com>, Kyle Schlesinger <kyle@email.com>

Sorry if this post is a little fractured. I am hoping I can keep working on it, especially if we're to eventually publish our group review. But for now, I thought it better not to keep writing, and keep the conversation going...

Given that so much has been said about the mechanical in regards to Michael's book. I think it is interesting to think about many of the motifs of early Hip-Hop, which evoke the (originally) urban subculture through a discourse about the Late-Capitalist posthuman. For instance, in "The Robot" (breakdance) the human body's mechanization is overdetermined, so that what results is a flight from the capture of machine age rhythms-the docility ascribed to these rhythms which are related through Fordist labor practices and militarization. Similarly, one can read rap and aerosol art (the two other major forms which emerge from Hip-Hop culture). as an over-codifying of visual and linguistic content (graffiti as hypertelic hieroglyphic). Like The Robot, the lines and arrows of "wild style" graffiti read in too many directions; in this regard, not unlike a Parinesi drawing or other mannerist artworks, they are *atopic*. Rap, too, points in too many directions presenting a desiring machine, cuts and flows upon a plane of common speech. The 'best' rap, like the best wild style or breakdance, produces a constant sense of surprise, if not shock. The rapper, in tandem with studio producer, DJ, and other elements of production forms a kind of bachelor machine... This might be one way to read Michael's relation to Rap prosody—through some sense of mechanical distribution. Though David's reading of Metal also applies in many ways to Hip-Hop, and I would stick with my previous sense that Michael is identifying with some of Hip-Hop's elocutionary modes, if not with its structures of feeling.

Today I taught Stephen Collis's essay, "Of Blackberries and the Poetic Commons," so the history of the commons is very much on my mind again. Doing some backtracking through Michael's sources specifically in "Sacred," I was struck by how much that section of the poem

is situated in problems of an English commons, and how problems of commons intersect with what others have been discussing here since my last post. For the 'scene' of "Sacred" is Trafalgar Square during no less than two moments in history. There is our era, in which Rachel Whiteread's 2001 sculpture, *Untitled Monument*, has been erected on the Fourth Plinth, the plinth left empty after their weren't sufficient funds to erect an equestrian monument of William the IV in 1841 when the square was designed. And there is the mid-19th century (1848 to be exact) in which we find citizens in a dispute about the latest Enclosure Act, a dispute which led the crowds at Trafalgar Square to riot on the week of March 6th of that year. Here again, as in the passage previously cited by Chris, we find the appearance of the police. Only whereas in the previous passage I relate the scene it presents playfully, as possibly having to do with feeding the meter/metre (could this be a scene in which Michael or someone else receives a parking ticket?), the scene we find in "Sacred" not only bears the threat of violence, but would appear a veritable bloodbath.

Tracing Michael's sources throughout "Sacred," I think I gained a better sense of his process. David hits the nail on the head when he says that one can have the "tone" of the work without any specific reference, many of which are rather hermetic, even in this age of Google. The specific tonalities I was discovering (beyond the percussive qualities and Rap-inflected machinic rhythms) are ones of analogy and association. The scene of riot in Trafalgar Square flickers between mid-19th century and the erection of Whiteread's sculpture in 2001, but it also slides into a scene of Ashura, the holiday that commemorates the martyrdom of Mohammad's grandson, Hussein, in Shi'ite Islam, in which men flog themselves and pierce their heads with knives. I am struck by the blending of these three scenes—their montage, or simply their association—because I think it may have some bearing on the title and the content of the poem, which has to do with we have been circling around as "abyss" (or "Hole") and "event."

Both line of police, rioters, and Ashura participants engage a *mnemotechnique* which an actual statue can only reify. In the place of this statue stands the "rite null set"; that which in Alain Badiou's mathematical ontology constitutes a place outside the present (Jamie's "black hole"?) by which the future (or possible futures) may be predicated. Not unlike Whiteread's sculptures, which presences the negative spaces that surround architectural and funerary objects—or in this case the object of a commemoration which never occurred for lack of funds, or because of the presence of dissensus—the "null set" of event (Enclosure riot or Ashura) produces a place in which the subject or subjects of sovereignty contract, a motion related through Zizek's Lacanese that Michael also sites in italics on p. 60 where he writes of the "*purely formal void*." This void, the *object a* of Lacan's late philosophy that makes possible the constitution of the subject retroactively, from a place outside the present—anterior to it—relates the "rite null set" as the rite in which subjectivity is subtracted from "events" such as that of Hussein's martyrdom and likewise the struggles of dissensus immanent to the production of (state) sovereignty.

Things slide in this poem. Images and language-fossils/hieroglyphs move by association. They resound referentially and tonally (like the "circles" to which Michael makes reference throughout the book). Michael, like Zukofsky and others before him, presents the poem in its textual-processural fact as an allegory of both historical, aesthetic, and social-political processes. I am interested in this speculative sliding and compaction in regards to an ekphrastic practice unfaithful towards its original object except inasmuch as that object might form a kind of supplement for allegory. Always it has been curious to me the weaving of works in "Scared." There is the Whiteread sculture/monument/architectural feature, which Michael provides the exact dimensions of, thus offering scaffolding for his reader, a kind of clue about his context but also information vital to foregrounding his very material-ontic preoccupations. It is important to Michael that the sculpture is a made thing, and that it uses particular materials and entails particular processes—aesthetic and otherwise. Why else does he enumerate the material qualities except to offer a record of their making, their quiddity if you will.

Something I find interesting about the Whiteread sculpture specifically, is that it offers an exact replica of the Fourth Plinth itself. So that standing on its 'head' (or "face"—Michael's references to faces seem significant in this section of the book) Whiteread's work forms a kind of mirror image (or death mask?) of the structure beneath it. There is a strange effect to *Untitled Monument*, looking at it in photos. A weird translucency unlike other lighting effects I've seen Whiteread produce using resin. "Grace" leads from this and other art works' "imponderable tympan[s]" which sound "between relief and its impression the recessed face of a pediment." This object projects the "grace" of a "blank" that overcomes Thorstein Veblen's imponderables, which have "colonized" the "future" (incidentally, in an earlier version of this poem, published at *Wild Horses Of Fire*, the lines about imponderables is attributed to correspondence with Rob Halpern). Somehow this would seem the work of art: to produce a space for the "rite null set" (or presentations of it) by which grace may be expressed.

What power, I have often wondered in regards to Michael's poetry, does art possess-what sovereignty or counter-sovereignty does it produce or express—to not re/produce the forces that would "colonize" the future or the dynamic Brenda cites via Agamben whereby "from a certain point, every decisive political event were double-sided: the spaces, the liberties, and the rights won by individuals in their conflicts with central powers always simultaneously prepared a tacit but increasing inscription of individuals' lives within the state order, thus offering a new and more dreadful foundation for the very sovereign power from which they wanted to liberate themselves." This statement embodies the difficulty of sovereignty, and specifically the problem of the commons as it is constituted in relation to state power.

What is striking to me, and I guess this goes back to my own sense of Michael's "faith"—in art, in poetry, in labor and collaboration, in various forms of "communion"—is some sense that grace would neutralize power, and that art provides an exceptional site for the experience of grace. Again, I would site Susan Howe and many others as predecessors to this intuition. A similar faith is expressed through the association of Twombly's "Coronation of Seostis" with Walter Benjamin's notion of "white eschatology," from his "Critique of Violence" discussed at length in Giorgio Agamben's *State of Exception*. "White eschatology" and Badiouian grace are related concepts because they both put forward notions of affirmation without dialectic and lawlessness without transcendence .

Here's Badiou:

I shall maintain that Paul's position is antidialectical, and that for it death is in no way

the obligatory exercise of the negative's immanent power. Grace, consequently, is not a "moment" of the Absolute. It is affirmation without preliminary negation; it is what comes upon us in caesura of the law. It is pure and simple *encounter*. (66)

And here is Agamben on Benjamin's notion of "white eschatology":

The baroque knows an *eskhaton*, an end of time; but as Benjamin immediately makes clear, this *eskhaton* is empty. It knows neither redemption nor a hereafter and remains immanent to this world: "The hereafter is emptied of everything that contains the slightest breath of this world, and from it the baroque extracts a profusion of things that until then eluded all artistic formulation... in order to clear an ultimate heaven and enable it, as a vacuum, one day to destroy the earth with catastrophic violence" [...].

It is this "white eschatology"—which does not lead the earth to a redeemed hereafter, but consigns it to an absolutely empty sky—that confers the baroque state of exception as catastrophe. And it is again this white eschatology that shatters the correspondence between sovereignty and transcendence, between the monarch and God [...]. (56-57)

In the case of Badiou's Paul, this affirmation has to do with the resurrection, which gives life not only to the dead, but to a particular notion of immanence, a notion of immanence through which what Badiou calls the "evental site" may appear. In the evental site a space is cleared for a universal singularity beyond or made possible in the suspension of the law. White eschatology, similarly does not result in redemption or transcendence, but cites a catastrophic violence immanent to the law's caesura.

It is odd the placement of Twombly's "Coronation" among the other texts on pg. 64. There is Robert Burns's "To a Mouse," in which the poet eulogizes his alienation from the mice who frequent his country home ("folk' heads sleckit, cowrin"). There is yet another site of enclosure, that of Helpstone, poet John Clare's hometown. There is also the language of the "fens," which are described in their ecological aspect as providing nutriments to the soil. Is Twombly's "Coronation" the site of a remediation project or a blighted bucolic? How do an encounter with Twombly's series of paintings, which make reference to a belligerent, Egyptian King, and this scene of remediation/ecological blight/codependence coordinate? How do they relate and supplement each other?

This painting, evoking Benjamin's "white eschatology," may relate the "sovereign efflux" of a natural terrain encroached upon by enclosure. Michael's "z-cited path" is most intense here, where we have a jumble of times and intertexts, as though natural processes themselves were convoluted with aesthetic and socio-political ones. Form comes from the "circle," a tonal circle formed by the sounding of a bell ("tocsin") redolent with the other rings we have encountered throughout the book. The bell forms a rim, a ring, a circle, a horizon. I am reminded that "the eye is the first circle" (Emerson), but also of Scalapino's work, which revises both Emersonian and Steinian "rose rims" (as though Emerson's and Stein's figure of the Trascendentalist rose also offered a site of exception, or simply ekstasis. Aesthetic autonomy—a "gilt wink of art's sovereignty"—mediates social antinomy. Art is a prioritized work of cultural production mediating social violence, while also offering entrance into states of exception, grace, caesura of law. Art "does to thinking for a turn involve." It gives fact to a "difference" otherwise

"normative grace," an aneconomical principle confounding the "pound[s] of flesh" by which one is subjected and registered. Grace provides lack of measure; perhaps it involves what Brenda is pointing us to through her own spasmodic, sputtering somatic poetics. Its quiddity and its sense abysmally ground one's encounter with the antinomian. As though a rigid measure "sqaur[ing]" the flesh could crack enclosure—it is telling that Whiteread's moulds cracked numerous times before they took hold, and even then needed to be reinforced by injections of resin. What remains, a la Adorno, is the work as processural "labor," not communication; immediacy produced through heightened mediation; the "chink" and not the "wall" of seen.

BrendaIijima<br/>brenda@yoyolabs.com>Fri,Nov5,2010at11:21AMReply-To:Brenda@yoyolabs.<br/>com To: CJ Martin <cm49600@gmail.com>, jamie townsend <greybridge@gmail.com> Cc: Thom<br/>Donovan <wildhorsesoffire@gmail.com>, DZ Brazil <dzbrazil@yahoo.com>, Kyle Schlesinger<br/><kyle@email.com>

My personal feeling is that, in the presence of such intense depth charge and so much to resysthesisze we should all take our time responding. This communal form of engagement has been so incredibly dimensional, I don't want it to end, echoing Jamie's sentiment, let's continue on in the tangerine encampment! Now that Rachel Whitehead's work is being considered within the mix, I want to endeavor to talk about gender dynamics in Haecceities and also color—the colorization of the text, specifically how white functions as marker. Personally it feels like it takes me ages to respond because I find I'm self-censoring some of my deepest statements and have to psychically get over each hump. Abyss/Event/Blind spot/Hotspot/Censor zones/Active Illusions/Idealism/Context/Historical Memory/Desire/Modes of Saying. These are the mine fields are brain-body has to hop through.

Viscous amber and slag, Brenda

jamie townsend <greybridge@gmail.com> Wed, Dec 8, 2010 at 9:05 PM To: Thom Donovan <wildhorsesoffire@gmail.com> Cc: CJ Martin <cm49600@gmail.com>, Brenda@yoyolabs.com, Kyle Schlesinger <kyle@email.com>, DZ Brazil <dzbrazil@yahoo.com>

Hi all

so I'm a little late on this but I've finally finished a draft of what I've been thinking about in terms of Michael's work for over the past month and a half. I hope its interesting and/or useful, and I'm really sorry for the delay. Looking forward to hearing everyone else's brilliant contributions:

My first experience of reading Michael's previous book, *In Felt Treeling*, was during a trip to the "Ringing Rocks"— a rock/boulder field in Northeastern Pennsylvania that rings, quite literally; resonating different bell-like tones when each rock is struck (many visitors bring hammers to "play" the field). Since then I've found myself unable to divorce this experience

from reading Michael's work – thinking of tones as something hard, solid, earthy, but also "monadic"; as singular perceptual units (re: Leibniz) that can arrange themselves into a scape of interconnected worlds, or as a chain of vibrations to create a score, a "scaffolding" (to use Thom's term) of sound. (I also can't help but think of one of our starting points, GMH's "As Kingfisher's Catch Fire", as well: "As tumbled over rim in roundy wells / Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell['s]"). These lines suggest a music that can speak to an ontological condition beyond immediate perception, or that our own levels of perception could possibly be shifted to encounter an audible threshold moment, or meta-scoring – something past the "rim" or "ring" (or "horizon"), which has already been noted as a common touchpoint for Michael. And that these sonic monads could be placeholders for the first *being*, wherein the unity of everything finds its source (as per the Pythagoreans: "One without division") as well. But just as important, and outside of speculation, what does this mean for the individual that is interested in approaching Michael's poetry as more than a sonic exercise, a pleasurable/ challenging sound or series of shifted tones in the ear? How to continue blurring (but not reducing in terms of effect) Pound's categorical separations - the logopoeia vs. the melopoeia - in terms ofhow an experimental poetry can function? And ultimately, how does this "field of tones" speak to larger political and social concerns; how can it provide a place of entry, a common ground on which to stand? I want to venture some thoughts on how this could be accomplished by looking at *Haecceities* as a document of "potentiality".

to start with, a response: Thom, I'm going to venture a rough guess and say that, in reference to your thoughts on the overlapping histories in "Sacred", examining of the text as either a "the site of a remediation project" or a "blighted bucolic" may instead be reconceived as holding the same space/weight in this section of the book. I am thinking specifically about Michael's use of the documentary film title "Kenyan Boran" on the page following your point of exegesis. The film focuses upon encroaching (and "civilizing") modernization on a herding tribe in the desert region of Kenyan, specifically how it affects their formally isolated way of life. Recently I worked with Brenda on developing an event recently held in Philadelphia where a panel of participants looked at and discussed issues around, among other texts, Jonathan Skinner's "poetics of a third landscape" — the urban/industrialized ecologies, the reconsidered space for the "natural" (that is) to enter the poem through a multiplicity of perspectives and I found myself thinking about Michael's work as I pulled together research for this event. In her essay for the *eco language reader*, "The Ecology of Poetry", Marcella Durand writes:

I have been thinking about the third and fourth dimensions of poetry as well—that poetry has the ability to interact with events, objects, matter, reality, in a way that animates and alters its own medium—that is, language. (123)

Reading *Haecceities* in tandem with Marcella and many of the essays in the *eco language reader*, I find Michael's work sympathetic to certain strands of ecopoetics in its engagement in various feedback system(s) (tonal, visual, political) working concurrently, rather than through an isolated, singular perspective; an example of Gregory Bateson's "ecology of mind". This includes Michael's reference to modernization's rapidity upon formally rural areas, and, in

turn, that concept's connectedness to Rachel Whiteread's inverted plinth sculpture. How all these art works reach both back into the past and forward into an unknown "further" space to enact a radical interrelation, albeit a de-centered one: ("I draw a circle, I draw a cluster of arcs from the circle labeled monads, / I write WORLD and EARTH" (65)). But also that we are dealing with a politics of space, architectural questions, what is claimed as exact, or possible (Whiteread's dimensional specs incorporated into Haecceties ground us in something physical, while simultaneously, the questions her work raise open up the potentialities of the temporal. Skinner grounds his thoughts in the work of landscape architect Gilles Clément in regards to the mutability of spatial prescription, ecologies of the *in-between*, and a sense of foundational potentiality and consistent variety in nature). That, in effect, spatial and temporal states also have their own ecologies (a la Paul Virilio's "grey ecology" or ecology of time), and that we must be attentive to them. Nietzche writes: "Man and man's earth are unexhausted and undiscovered" (And Thus Spake Zarathustra) at the end of the 19th Century – and it is a statement that rings ever more true today with the limitless space, the "everywhere and nowhere" space, of the virtual, the non-Euclidean, the hauntological. In this contemporary space of latent potentiality Haecceities engages language on its own terms and in doing so asks vital questions. How do the previously termed "old ways" share temporal space with "the new"? How, in turn, do we move past the tendency to create dialectics everywhere, to bifurcate, but at the very same time engage in language's singular ability to *uncover*? In his review of Jacques Rancière's The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing, Michael invokes Deleuze's use of the term "haecceities" to describe a space of both radical inclusivity and potentiality: "the resultant text [The Flesh of Words] finds Rancière reading Rimbaud's 'illegible' language of the body next to Deleuzian 'becomings and haecceities' as egalitarian political theaters by which we might uncover complacencies and stage interventions into the consensual "policing" of the distribution of the sensible" (IJBS 2,2 2005).

In effect, the "slide" that you mention in your last post Thom, could be an overlapping or contemporaneousness of historical points or eras within that may envoke the time/space singularity, in that it takes up multiple distinct linear perspectives simultaneously; it opens a space of infinite potentiality. It is both the remediation and the blight because they interact (composting) – like the "unfinished" plinth and its inversion sculpted. (I love the image you bring up of Whiteread's attempts at making this plinth, of the "cracked" absence; that the representation itself cannot hold a completely static form, that our materials to approach "space" themselves are messy and difficult, they resist complete measure: "I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America. I spell it large because it comes large here. Large and without mercy." (Olson, Call Me Ishmael)). That this approach is a measure of care (and I agree with your use of "grace" as its multiplicity can be mediated only by or through care). Inasmuch it may simultaneously broaden experience of and shrink focus (to the chink that holds a thin view of whatever is beyond); to a engage in a multi-dimensional and extraperceptive activity that involves both precision and receptivity. This leads me back, again, to the edge of the abyss/event that we are all awaiting; an imagined or promised, but not (vet?) realized future, one of latent expectancy: Rousseau's "impossible abyss that is impossible to satisfy" (quoted by Arkadii Dragomoshchenko - "Memory Gardens"). That this promise might also be one of socialization, an engaging of the collective specter, and a way into the text through its potentiality, its inclusiveness of "tone", "multiplicity" and "chance"; Zukofsky's integral "lower limit speech, upper limit music" as an activation ("how I speak for a posse / is steam purls, that that's my word" (Haecceities 72)), a boiling, a shifting states. And finally, that an apprehension of this process of "becoming" may be the closest that we can get to a real experience of history, or even time itself.

I want to return briefly to "Specters of Marx" and Derrida's exploration of the *hauntologic* historical (that which is not/can not be dated, or what Derrida terms "staging for the end of history" (SoM 10)) in relation to potentiality, and some of my earlier thoughts on the event horizon/abyss. I've been thinking quite a bit about CJ's earlier statement: "the occult may threaten to body forth as a visitation", in regards to the specter and the absence marked, made physical, or recognized as such. Attempting to look at Michael's text (in tandem with Derrida's) as not only a model for radical experimentation but also as a place of return, a common place that anyone or any other could come "to be". "Repetition and first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost" (SoM 10). This idea of visitation, the felt presence of a previous voice, is what the companion volume to "Specters..." knowingly titles "Ghostly Demarcations", the interim area between the mark and its absence. Haunting reawakens us as it necessities a physical form and a meta-physical impression, a remembrance of; that we are haunted by potentiality as well, couched in the experiences of the body, while on the edge of the as-of-yet/the unforeseen (or for that matter unforesee-able). "For it is flesh and phenomenality that give to the spirit its spectral apparition, but which disappear right away in the apparition" (SoM 6). I am drawn to the epigraph for "Plinth Course, which presents Derrida's "Musical sense of being 'in time" - that music is built on the fluidity of absence and presence, that it stretches out in patterns of beats and silence – bodies appearing and disappearing "in time". In this way haunting (ongoing, present participle form) presents itself as a continuous episode of potentiality, but simultaneously of constant interruption This poses an alternative to a strict dialectic, or an experience of trans-positioned "otherness". Dealing with the multiple apparitions that could be, could cast their influences on a present moment, haunting constitutes a unified disruption confronting the limits of the linear, and imploding them to being's thrall; "we the form in gauze curtains / no wind is the kings..." (Haecceities 76).

It is also vital that Derrida specifically notes Marx "belongs to a time of disjunction" (SoM 174), and that the agent is this time breakage but also of a return to the body ("haunting" requires the event of a body), undefined in the sense of border (where does this body begin or end?), uncertain. I feel this sense throughout Michael's work, that close interplay between the immediate physical and the separate *sense of* the continuous/disrupted physical that halos each form (David's excellent talk on "hauntology" that Michael re-posted on Disinhibitor more elegantly unpacks the "halo" of presence/absence in the wake of linear disruption). In this sense Derrida's Marx is *unheimliche*, the present voice resonating its strange familiarity, an essence half-understood or almost remembered that serves to shift and reorient focus, the presence that persists and even amplifies itself throughout an aggregation of historical markers. For me reading Michael invokes a similar experience – hearing a voice that can be a multiple,

or the potentiality of a multiple – that can implode the "then" and "now" to something more layered and dynamic. In the play, as Hamlet questions the ghost, it enters, it exits, and it enters again — all at once the air is marked and scored thru with potential, with openings. Here multiple presences are felt in the lack of a physicality, phantom limbs that attune the nerve to apprehend a larger historical and social body that has been marred, attune all our focus toward a further epistemological drift: "The absent center that is the ghost of a king" (Susan Howe – "A Bibliography of the King's Book: Or, Eikon Basilike"). So, likewise, Michael's time that bleeds the times of Ashura, Whiteread, and the Trafalgar Square riot into each other, is *out of joint, dislodged*, cannot hold a firm line as it once seemed to, as it never really did.

much peace -J

Kyle Schlesinger <kyle@email.com> Wed, Dec 29, 2010 at 3:43 PM To: Brenda Iijima <brenda@yoyolabs.com>, jamie townsend <greybridge@gmail.com>, thom donovan <wildhorsesoffire@gmail.com> Cc: Chris Martin <cm49600@gmail.com>, DZ Brazil <dzbrazil@yahoo.com>

Hi everyone,

Thought you might like to see Karla Kelsey's review of Michael's book: http://www. constantcritic.com/ karla\_kelsey/haecceities/

Love and best wishes in the New Year!

Kyle

CJ Martin <cm49600@gmail.com> Fri, Feb 11, 2011 at 9:05 PM To: Thom Donovan <wildhorsesoffire@gmail.com> Cc: Kyle Schlesinger <kyle@email.com>, Brenda Iijima <br/> <br/

Hi everyone:

#### "mouth full-twined mail (entwined scales)..." (61)

I've been digging into Jacques Attali's *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* as a way of returning for an approach to the material practice of *Haecceities*. Here's Attali:

"All music, any organization of sounds is then a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community, of a totality. It is what links a power center to its subjects, and thus, more generally, it is an attribute of power in all its forms. Therefore, any theory of power today must include a theory of the localization of noise and its endowment with form" (6).

In Michael's work, as I think we've said already, sonic trouble is biopolitical trouble. Meter's a cinch & we're in treble. So, Attali's thinking suggests an avenue for engaging the sonic life

Michael's book, given his stress on the essentially political nature of producing sound, of organizing sounds. Reading back through, I think our conversation has gone a long way to teasing this politics out, prompted as we've been by Michael's own labors and the constellation of labors he traces in *Haecceities*.

While the passage from Attali might be read as simply another way of naming *poetics*, I'm interested here in attaching noise to the discussion, as integral to Michael's material practice. And the more time I spend with it, the more Attali's argument offers a way of accounting for my own interest in Michael's work. I've often felt some anxiety in relation to what I've struggled to understand as my own aesthetic preoccupation, fearing that my idiosyncrasies as a reader of Michael's work begin to approach the apolitical, and at times I've wondered if my own interest (to call up Blanchot's austere formulation) might be what most threatens that reading. But Attali opens an avenue for recuperating an attention to surfaces by politicizing sound.

To double back to GMH, it's in terms of a material practice that I think Hopkins can be read alongside Michael as theorizing power. Both are poets for whom "the localization of noise and its endowment with form" is—as a guiding concern—difficult to extricate from a reading of the thought that moves the form, except when the concern overrides a reading of that thought. So, in speaking of the sonic labor(s) of Michael's poems, I want to be careful to distinguish between gestures toward pleasure or sense and the work of theorizing the localization of noise, of noise as theorizing, of the theorizing noises. This is one place where I suspect Michael might be read as complicating that formula for upper and lower limits we have from Zukofsky by pointing up noise as a further limit, in part since 'music' and 'speech' (in general, when that formula gets deployed) seem to rest in some sort of legibility, to stop just short of the illegible (even if LZ's poems didn't rest in just the two limits).

My beginning at the occult in this discussion was in part a way of pointing to exactly this: that in Michael's work, the surface, the material limit, isn't always seen through, doesn't always give way to some sort of context, and I'd argue that the same might be said of Hopkins. That, in his notion of 'inscape' and 'instress,' there's the material movement of an address to power, as much as a 'musical' movement and in excess of any theological content. In both poets' work, we don't always read back of the palimpsest (yeah, I'm rereading *The H.D. Book*) as much as we work the worn surface thereof (Taylor's waste margin). As David said re initiation in *Haecceities*, we may not get the reference but we get the tone (more on this).

Hopkins, in the noise of his address to power, theorizes power. He is, in that sense, a radical: his own material practice is presumptuous inasmuch as it's an excess, a prayer so flung towards ornament as to seem even confident of keeping company, as artificer, with the divine. In a sermon from November 23, 1879, he describes his relationship to his god in a way that always struck me as both deeply sentimental and somehow iconoclastic, presumptuous: "I come to his mind." I'm often tempted to read this as a fairly direct statement of his prosody. Part of what Michael shares with Hopkins is that the sonic/material practice isn't simply an address to power, isn't just 'about' power or a relationship to it, but it fucking *presumes* to power, moves it, if only (in Michael's work) to attempt to dismantle it.

And still there's Michael's love of the OED Kyle taps from the start that puts him alongside Duncan, tracing things 'back of' their surfaces. And I don't mean to deny this activity of his work, because I think others have shown here that readers *are* asked to make that gesture, to read the thought. But there's also the demand to confront the thought materially that makes Attali prescient. I'm starting to think this politics of noise might even suggest one possible route into what Brenda has on her itinerary—the gender dynamics of *Haecceities*.

For me, it's as matter that these theorizing noises engage the dynamics of difference, and for that reason I'd offer that Michael's sound work is as indebted to feminist/post-colonial linguistic theory as to any field poetics. Myung Mi Kim and Rachel Blau Duplessis (who've preoccupied me lately along similar lines) are two writers for whom the demand for a material confrontation with power—via noise—has the potential to contest initiation as a demand of reading. Often it's not the occulted but *the redacted* we read in these poets' work, the wail as speech act, an illegibility offered as utterance. In my reading, these are gestures that require next to nothing of initiation, at least when the theorizing noises refuse to resolve into a rhetoric, and thus they're gestures that move—by way of that refusal—to dismantle initiation by force.

I'm borrowing Elizabeth Grosz's terms here, who calls for replacing 'the body,' 'ideology,' and 'gender' in critical terminology with MATTER, FORCE, and DIFFERENCE.—So to put a fine point on it: I don't want to presume to claim Michael's sound work for any particular activism, but I will presume to claim that the work's only really possible in the wake of feminist and post-colonial investigations of sound production as power site.

To return to Thom's last exhaustive response, I think we could count Rachel Whiteread's *Untitled Monument* as one such investigation. I'd like to pick up on the presence of Whiteread, herself a redactionist, elsewhere in Michael's book. I'd agree with Thom that "Sacred" is evidence of "an ekphrastic practice unfaithful to its original object." However, in "Plinth Course" there's a pretty interesting strike through, where the poem incessantly remixes the 'p' and 'c' sounds of the title and forces a sonic redaction throughout, in what I'd argue is an address to power approximating Whiteread's own strike through on the plinth in Trafalgar Square. Duncan might have called what I'm about to trace 'sets' or 'rimes,' but I'd prefer to work these sets as surface, to perform a surface reading as close reading, prompted at least in part by the abstracted letterforms that loom so large in the design, as well as by Jamie's last sound-ings through this book and Brenda's animal list. These percussive elements in Michael's poem are (also) a resin cast atop rhetoric—a *reson* that pauses rhetoric, in much the same way Whiteread sought, in *Untitled Monument*, "to insert a pause in London" (Interview in *Time*).

To isolate these phonemic threads is to *flatten* the text—and this method invites a resemblance to constraint experiments like Derek Beulieu's *Flatland* in terms of an exegetical strategy—but it seems to me that doing so draws into sharper relief the preponderance of noises and noise relationships in Michael's poem. (After performing the attached redactions, I found myself missing the thick music that this kind of reading totally buries, and returning to a clean copy to hear that shit in full! See figures 4.a. and 6.a. for examples of a redoubled attention to phrasal music suggested by my redactions.) So I realize that in this super provisional approach I'm in danger of *opposing* noise to music/poetic device, but I'll risk it: could we not also understand

"the meadow in the throat" as the *sound* of the meadow in the throat, the sound of *unorganized* sound—of 'natural' noise? So that it's exactly faith we choke on—the belief or presumption that we'd arrive, via localizing sounds, at *return* or *first permission*? Or the presumption that we could artistically produce natural noise? That poetry could be *subsistence*? (Brenda's inversion—"the throat in the meadow"—seems to dismantle this notion, Auroras-of-Autumn style.) ... Even that we could inhabit art as "an exceptional site for the experience of grace" (as Thom has it—and I wouldn't really disagree, though would want some qualification)?

(Thom's & Jamie's tracking us through a U.S. wilderness in Dickinson-Olson-Howe is certainly useful here, as is Brenda's postanimal wilds, and I'm not yet sure how the plastic edge I'm about to trace engages that work, but anyway the above were just some of the questions that guided this reading, which was aided in no small part by discussions with Julia Drescher, whose research into the dog's bark dovetailed in some really interesting ways.)

A first (restricted) map:

- 22 Plinth Course
- $23 \underline{p} la \underline{c} e \underline{c} om \underline{p} oses \underline{c} om \underline{p} osed$
- 25 (plank) parchment
- $26 \underline{c}rop \underline{c}orpus\underline{c}le \underline{c}ompound (\underline{p}astor \underline{k}ind) \underline{c}apricious$
- 28 <u>carapace pathic porcelain porcelain Porcelain</u>
- 29 caprice
- 30 <u>p</u>a<u>c</u>e
- 31 paucity
- 32 Sylphic
- $33 \underline{p}au\underline{c}us \underline{p}lace$

I really want to resist reading some deeper meaning in my own redactions, but it might help to clarify the methodology. Initially, I approached this reading by isolating all the words containing both a p and a c. Again, the more I crossed out, the more I was tempted to amend my constraint, which you'll note already happened in the list above, where a hyphenated word pair slips in via another permission—the k as too close in proximity to the hard c to be elided. After allowing the k, x quickly followed, and now I'm reminded that a hard g and a hard c are closer cousins than a hard c and a sibilant c. All of which is to say that this exceptical constraint purposefully attempts (but mostly fails) to obstruct a reading of the musical phrase (*and* the thought), in order to suggest that part of Michael's sound work involves erecting a material scaffolding of/in sound that points up evacuated or 'pure' form as one edge of its critique.

Percussion is foundational in these poems, and to 'percuss'—even to beat box—produces a sound that's really way too close to the sounds my redactions isolate to escape mention. So noise is a backbeat, but at the same time I'm convinced that Michael's work permits as rider the kind of noise that doesn't make itself legible as organizational, noise that is to the musical phrase what *Untitled Monument* is to the plinth—a "rite null set." David's discussion of the cover image—the "crossed out" Dürer—gets at some of what I mean: "That we may not know that the image is derived from Dürer does not deprive us from the faculty to feel its *tone*. Likewise, even without detail of feature, we perceive a mass, a form, which continues to be articulate even though the veil renders it negated, inoperative, *sous rature*—crossed out, if you will." Later, gorgeously, David writes: "If these forms are a sort of libidinally charged wreckage, they have a power derived from that which is separable from whatever doctrinal history—& may even turn out to be the unocculted form of that doctrinal history—pure shaped affect known as such, in the space of its inoperativity."

I'd argue that we can also see this kind of negation in the sonic thread /p/-/c/, and potentially elsewhere in this book. What I love about the restricted list above is that the words for p. 28 offer such a literal answer to the question, "What whitens a paucity of white": *porcelain, porcelain, Porcelain!* But this is exactly the point: as answer to that question it's only hilarious, but as noise it's relentless drone, and it continues in the redacted version of the same page (fig. 5). (In the attached file, words with either a p or a c—and/or the proximal phonemes to the p and c of the title—were left visible, with parentheses around words containing the letters p and/or c but *not* the specific phonemes from the title.) The full set for this page looks something like this:

(evidence) – carapace – green-plan's – (once) – plumed top-mast – brick – lip – pelages – pathic – fecund – (once) – (sylph) – pour porcelain – porcelain – Eryx – (Alcides) – bulk upborne – torpid – Porcelain – (face)

I think of this constrained sonic thread as at least intuited, if not entirely plotted—that this kind of drone is evidence of Michael's sense of the "ghostlier, pathic" relationship between letters and sounds or even between unorganized and organized noises. The /p/-/c/ thread persistently punctuates the musical phrase, but not just as beat. It's an interruption, or a kind of sonic montage, a separate score set atop the predominant (already layered) score. I'd call it a fugue if it didn't sound more like a fax machine. It's particularly interesting when the phonemes from the title drop out of earshot, even though the letters that produce them remain visible. The "face," for instance, shows up in this reading of the poem as closer to the veiled Dürer than to a poetic image or theoretical construct: per Thom's reading of "Sacred," there are 5 references to "face" in "Plinth Course," but in the redaction, they're more of a structural machination, where the potential percussion of c becomes sibilance. Then there's the conspicuous repetition: in addition to the already mentioned "porcelain" refrain, there's "(louche) - (louche) - PAINT - PAINT - milk - (switch) - milk - (louche)" (fig. 7) and later "(once) - (once) - shape - shapes - (once) - (once) - pleasure, pleasure - shape - pleaser's - (face) - (face) - please - (surface)" (fig. 10). Feels a little like listening to a washing machine. Or rather, listening to *Michael* listening, feeling for the illegible edge of a lexicon.

I can't help even registering a feeling of paranoia at the newly redacted ending of the poem: "(face) – please – detexted – (surface)" (fig. 10). But I'm willing chalk this one up to a nostalgia for back masking...

Sorry for such a long post! Hope it's at least a little useful. And that everyone's well!

More in a bit—C

When schedules began to shift, the pace of the discussion slowed, so, in the interest of publishing a timely review, we've chosen to present the discussion unfinished. As always, more on this...

## Unabridged jacket copy for Haecceities Taylor Brady

In *Haecceities*, Michael Cross extends his engagement with a metrics of the word into a prosody of the lexicon. Shaped by the torsions of a space where the word is both unit of measure and the quiddity on which measure bears, these poems push Zukofsky's word-count line toward an encounter with Duncan's sense of prosody as 'open possibilities of design.' There is a difficult joy in rhythms that strain and spring (Hopkins-like?) to work that openness in fields of what we might have thought otherwise enclosures and foreclosures. A preference in diction for the archaic ('aroint,' 'halidom,' 'volant') or the contemporary-obsolete ('pleather,' 'kodachrome') is not mannerism, but a call to encounter words before the boundaries they stake have been fully settled, or after they've been overgrown. Words, arising weed-like in the abeyance of their legislated meanings, occur as sound, or as song. Here I recall as well that the lexeme of these poems' measure lives in imagination as both word-unit and law-unit, and that to drive a wedge—to disenclose the space—between these two powers, to discover the field of words' public illegality, is a central task for poetry.

Prompted by the force of this outlaw song, a reader may then dig, unearthing ruins or uncovering shoots of what such 'rich and strange' vocabularies have or shall have brought to light as meaning. This philologist's and lexicographer's delving, and the articulations and rhythms of the source texts it activates, must be taken as an outside located within the articulation of the poem itself: rhythmic duration as *extimacy*. What emerges for me in this digging—research as song, singing as search—is how densely the domain (or *demesne*, to give the poems' lexicon its due) of these words is packed with sites of emergence, the words themselves naming points at which the abstraction of meaning from song, law from custom, value from use, army from body, state from commune, first proposes itself as possibility.

Archaism and anachronism thus become transit-points by which I read myself back to a place of decision where such processes—not yet having hardened into the world we falsely know as the one, given, and historically inevitable World—are taking place, but have not yet taken place or do not yet (and no longer?) have a place to take. Vocabularies of heraldry mark the passage, through the vanishing medium of the emblem, of practical magics of interchange with land, animal, kinship and dwelling, into the symbolic obduracy of nation, property, inheritance and fortification. Outmoded and specialist jargons of domestic, sacred, and martial architecture mark the nascence of a split between the craft worker's 'respect for materials' and the built allegory of divine command. Crucially, this nascence, throughout the poems, is also a nescience: we do not yet know how this will turn out or, having taken sufficient distance from the point of decision, we are faced again with the necessity to decide now. We remain to this side of the archaic, the medieval, the obsolete: words in *Haecceities* are haecceities, and site us still in the opening of a chronicle we had misrecognized as closed. The possibility I find enacted as song in this opening is that the *not-yet* of historical closure might be the waste margin in which to glean a new life in common with words.

## Notes on Labor and Regeneration

Michael Cross

Originally published in *P-Queue*, vol. 2 (2005).

Out of the eater came forth food, and out of the strong came forth sweetness<sup>1</sup> (Samson, upon discovering a swarm of bees in the corpse of a lion)

Invocation:

Ye deities! Who fields and plains protect Who rule the seasons, and the year direct, Bacchus and fostering Ceres, powers divine, Who gave us corn for mast, for water, wine: Ye Fauns, propitious to the rural swains, Ye nymphs that haunt the mountains and the plains, Join in my work, and to my numbers bring Your needful succor; for your gifts I sing.<sup>2</sup>

I sing, Maecenas, and I sing to thee<sup>3</sup>

Be thou propitious, Caesar! guide my course<sup>4</sup>

Great father Bacchus! To my song repair<sup>5</sup>

Thy fields, propitious Pales, I rehearse; And sing thy pastures in no vulgar verse<sup>6</sup>

Maecenas, read this other part, that sings Embattled squadrons and adventurous kings— A mighty pomp, though made of little things. Their arms, their arts, their manners, I disclose, And how they war, and whence the people rose. Slight is the subject, but the praise not small, If Heaven assist, and Phoebus hear my call.<sup>7</sup>

Invocation is the ideal enactment of language. It sings *submission* by yielding to the greater song of sovereignty. That is not to say, however, that invocation, as *plea for permission*, is mere passivity. It is a system of exchange: the muse enacts the poet's force, sustains the duration of the song, and shelters her from error, presumption, and violence; all of this in exchange for the poet's fidelity. The danger is in choosing one's muse incorrectly, or worse, in singing one's

#### verse off-key.

Virgil, in *The Georgics*, recognizes the danger of these competing interests. His pastoral is comprised of four discrete sections (calling to mind the division of the seasons): the first covers plowing and weather; the second, trees and vines; the third, livestock and disease; and the fourth, bee keeping. Each is a single measure enacting both the labor of the singer (the lyric voice) and that of the swain (apotheosized hero), a kind of hymn or polyphonic chant purporting to celebrate the rustic through its submission to heterogeneous registers of power: statesmanlike Maecenas, patron and protector, who prompted Virgil to write a poem in praise of agriculture in order to stimulate the growing of wheat;<sup>8</sup> Caesar Augustus, who once disposed...his farm near Mantua in order that veterans might be settled on the land;<sup>9</sup> and a variety of pagan figureheads, the Pales and Bacchants primarily, the latter of whom killed...and strewed (Orpheus') mangled limbs about the field.<sup>10</sup> The Georgics, though formally a didactic work on the virtues of agriculture and labor, is a poem of force, as Simone Weil would have it. Its multiple trajectories enact an unsettling river *Lethe*, resituating and disintegrating bonds of loyalty through negation. And as his song is projected toward both divine and corporeal authorities, the poet reinforces the myth that the lyric voice is the source of its own articulation. This creates the false impression that song is linear and unidirectional, that in some sense the competing interests of the divine and state structures are ameliorated by the prostrations of the poet, that the poet herself enacts the gathering force of logos. But paradoxically, the subjectpoet mouthpiece of the invocation occupies her own plateau "outside" power, toward an authority protean in shape and function. Which is to say, the poet *produces* by simultaneously recognizing and sublating secular and divine interests, reconciling servitude to both and neither. In this sense, then, the invocation is a kind of praxis through submission. The more the poet feigns ignorance of existing structures of power, the more the lyric swells with saccharine sentimentality; her supposed inability to address sociopolitical pressures only serves to make them tangible in their absence. Her cunning lies in this very silence (a kind of resistance): opacity makes physically manifest the text's untruth.

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As husbandry implies dominion and management over that which will submit, in its purely didactic form, it advocates the inevitable domination of the landscape for the good of its occupants. As such, *The Georgics* adopts an ecopoetic guise; it takes nature as its subject, only to argue fervently for its domination. By analogy, the reader takes the poet as substitutable for nature as both are dominated by a greater force at the periphery of the poem. The more the narrative shies away from the political real the more metaphors of hardship instantiate labor: the obdurate soil; pestilence, famine, and disease in livestock; the harsh and unpredictable patterns of weather; Bacchant intoxication unleashed upon the source of song:

Red blisters rising on their paps appear, And flaming carbuncles, and noisome sweat, And clammy dews, that loathsome lice begat; Till the slow-creeping evil eats his way, Consumes the parching limbs, & makes the life his prey.<sup>11</sup>

The celebration of labor morphs into an extended jeremiad of degeneration gesturing toward the irreconcilable relationship between human and nature. If it attempts to justify the biblical doctrine of "man's" dominion, its results are incommensurate economies, juxtaposing violence with benevolence. The multiple epyllion (tangential mini-epics) in the poem offer still shots of chaos in the face of totality, disguised as wild horses full of *amorous rage, submitting the females to the lusty sire...Then serve(ing) their fury with the rushing male, indulging pleasure.*<sup>12</sup> The tract on apiculture in book four sings the virtues of the bees (*Of all the race of animals, alone / The bees have common cities of their own, / And common sons; beneath one law they live...All is the state's; the state provides for all<sup>13</sup>) only to suspend this thread to sing of the violent death of Orpheus:* 

With furies and nocturnal orgies fired, At length against his sacred life conspired. Whom e'en the savage beasts had spared, they killed, And strewed the mangled limbs about the field. Then, when his head, from his fair shoulders torn, Washed by the waters, was on Hebrus borne, E'en then his trembling tongue invoked his bride With his last voice, 'Eurydice,' he cried 'Eurydice,' the rocks and river-banks replied<sup>14</sup>

The poet enacts a dangerous dialectic that at once aligns the swain and her labor with the enlightened social structure of the bees, only to portray the brutal death of the poet as a product of a failed synthesis between the anthropocentric and ecological. And it is because of this tension that the poem's didacticism ultimately fails (while the poem itself succeeds).

Ultimately, Virgil's romanticization of the Orphic undercuts his feigned sense of nationalism, as Orpheus' fate trumps the dogmatism of the previous pages. It is not an accident that the violent dismemberment is due, in part, to a failure of invocation. His poem does nothing (that is, in terms of instrumentality). It is illegitimate, incompetent—it fails to produce. And while his lyre tames the wild beasts, infusing nature itself with sorrow, the Bacchants remain unmoved and *at length against his sacred life conspire*.<sup>15</sup> However, while Virgil points to the violence of the swain's labor, he gestures toward the fact that, even beheaded, Orpheus, the Christ-poet, sustains his song (and in so doing, manages to incite a response from nature): *E'en then his trembling tongue invoked his bride/With his last voice*, '*Eurydice*,' *he cried*, / '*Eurydice*,' *the rocks and river-banks replied*.<sup>16</sup> For Virgil, Orpheus' dismemberment is the sublimation of poet into lyre-head, a pure singing that is the argument between his unified body and its strewn limbs. Michael Lieb writes of Orphic dismemberment: *Although initially destructive, this is essentially a creative process, one in which the unconscious self is subjected* 

*to a kind of dismemberment in preparation for its reintegration in the world of consciousness.*<sup>17</sup> The moment of violence makes the structure of power, its peripheries, its multiple centers, materialize in the text. The poet cannot help but articulate the social index (even if only through negation); the duration of the song, its force against the greater force of the outside, becomes the central concern of the poem and ultimately morphs into a polyvalent expression of woe. The result: the regeneration of absent power structures through commensurable analogies of violence.

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The Pales is the invocation of a larger work entitled *LEGION*, an extended jeremiad that attempts to articulate the aforementioned principles. Each stanza is an epyllion in the fractured form of invocation, a series of persistent digressions/regressions on similar themes, within the same temporal space. The duration of each verse is itself the fleeting hymn of Orpheus, at once lament *and* imminent. Minor nuances in locution signal varying shifts in key as the lyric encounters pressures from the outside. The duration of each is ultimately inside the moment of dismemberment, articulating various modes of power as they shuck sense from the stanzas' comprehensibility.

Nathaniel Mackey argues that song is both a complaint and a consolation dialectically tied to that ordeal, where in back of 'orphan' one hears echoes of 'orphic,' a music which turns on abandonment, absence, loss.<sup>18</sup> The invocation attempts to articulate the "invisible life," the very competing pressures that Virgil seems to undercut in his attempt to praise the bucolic. Because music exists, the tangible and visible cannot be the whole of the given world. The intangible and invisible is itself a part of this world, something we encounter, something to which we respond.<sup>19</sup> In order to respond in good faith, the language and syntax of *The Pales* is constantly twisting in on itself as sense emerges through contortion. Each time we are served by words, we mutilate them. But the poet is not served by words. He is their servant. In serving them, he returns them to the plentitude of their nature, makes them recover their being.<sup>20</sup> The language articulates nature's rejoinder to Bacchant violence by making corporeal its very impotence in the face of such violence. In the invocation, immanence and transcendence meet, making the music social as well as cosmic, political and metaphysical as well.<sup>21</sup>

To tend and to yield, a practice of language as apiculture, to act as the doppelganger of a social formation always already at odds with its own source of power, *The Pales* is entrenched in a site of violence and imminence. Its product is a congested palimpsest of historical documents: Virgil's *Georgics*, Nicander's *Poems and Poetical Fragments*, Thomas Tusser's *His Good Points of Husbandry*, Marcus Porcius Cato and Marcus Terentius Varro's *On Agriculture*, Maurice Materlinck's *The Life of the Bee*. These competing voices sing simultaneously within *The Pales* as fugal threnody, producing a patchwork of competing interests that attest to the fleeting apparition of the sovereign, disappearing in the fold of verdant lushery at the tensor point of the urban landscape that is our current political real.

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### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Judges 14
  <sup>2</sup> Virgil, *The Georgics*, p. 7
  <sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 7
  <sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 9
  <sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 39
  <sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 75
  <sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 113
  <sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. ix
  <sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. vii
  <sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 143
  <sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 108
  <sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 79
  <sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 121
  <sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 143
  <sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 143
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 143
- <sup>17</sup> Michael Lieb, Milton and the Culture of Violence, p. 15
- <sup>18</sup> Nathaniel Mackey, *The Politics of Poetic Form* (ed. Bernstein), p. 88
- <sup>19</sup> Victor Zuckerkandl, Sound and Symbol: Music and the External World, p. 71
- <sup>20</sup> Octavio Paz, The Bow and the Lyre, p. 37
- <sup>21</sup> Nathaniel Mackey, The Politics of Poetic Form (ed. Bernstein), p. 91

# Appendix: Redactions of "Plinth Course"

A surface reading performed by C.J. Martin

See the final post of the group review for a discussion.



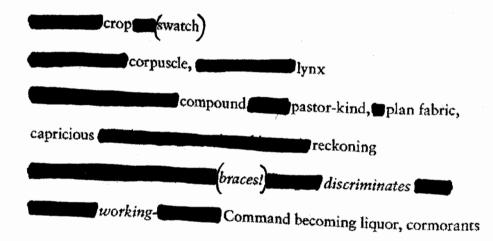
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g-/c/ fugue

4.a.

evidence
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sylph)pour porcelain
porcelain
Eryx, (Alcides)
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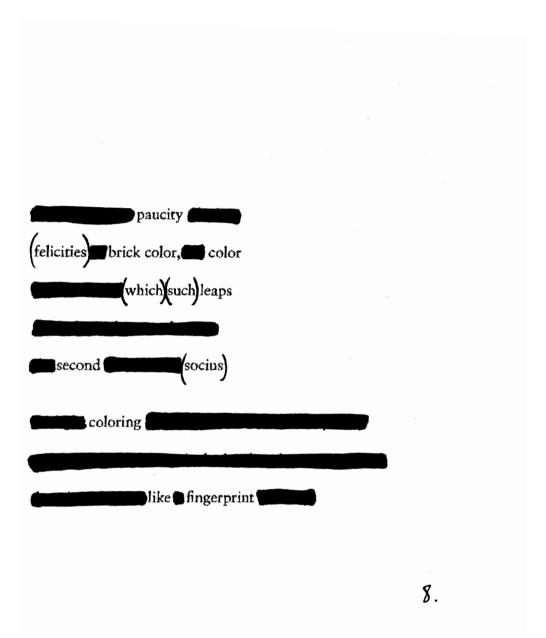
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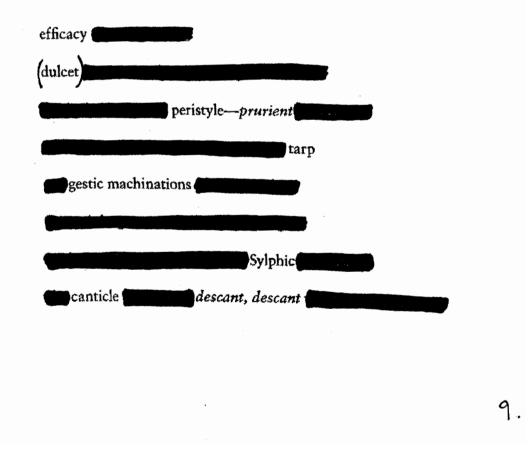
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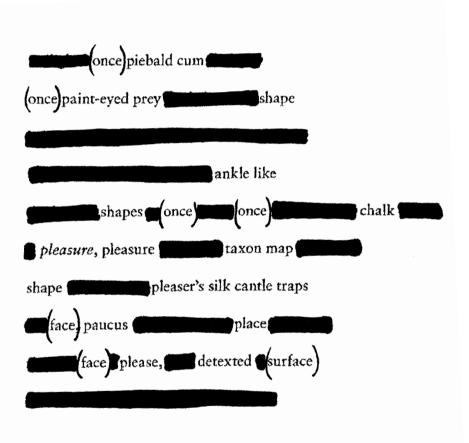
6. a. against the greater weight of face, jocund, teem-eyed, oxen sublimmy says wood, liminal, the nave walk dear away they say swallow somatically the crow against the face arbiters of wood, saddling caprice, the wooded; active, folds in lg/ & /x/ as consine al carries it, but /c/ becomes super

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