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*Geist*

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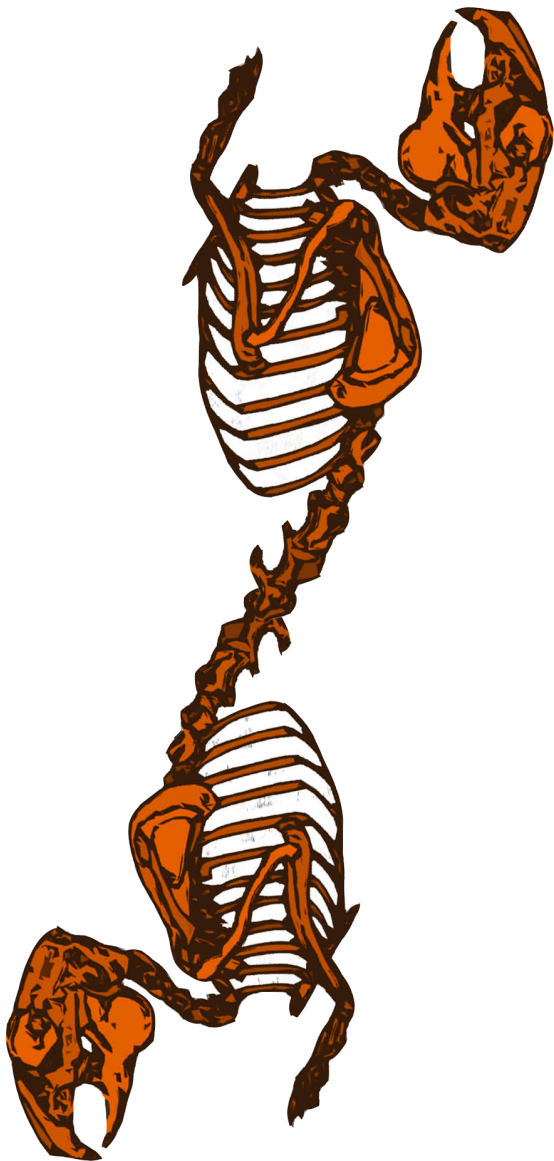
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# a foreword to readers

from the editor-in-chief

This is, of course, the inaugural issue of the *Geist*, Vanderbilt University's undergraduate journal of philosophy. I am proud to say that we received a great number of submissions, and that many were judged to be compelling, articulate, and provocative essays. The editors have worked hard to give close and attentive readings to each submission, and to select a pluralistic constellation of articles that reflect the diverse interests and dispositions of our contributors. For this, I think it obvious that the first release of our publication should be cause for celebration.

How to celebrate such an occasion? Or, as this *is* an undergraduate philosophy journal, perhaps we can clarify and inquire instead: what does it mean to celebrate such an event? What does it mean for undergraduate students around the world to be able to come together, submit and critique one another's work, and to disseminate their thoughts to the public at large? (We received submissions from other countries besides the United States, much to our delight.) We might even rearticulate this question further: what does it mean for us to see undergraduates of such interdisciplinary backgrounds to come together under the vocation of persistent critical inquiry?

The antecedent to the "We" in the previous sentence is, of course, the philosophical community, crudely and somewhat ambiguously delineated. The use of the ambiguous pronoun is conscientious, because I think it important for us to understand how such ambiguity is precisely what this publication mutely points towards as cause for celebration. Tethered to the dissemination of this journal is the diverse commitment of undergraduate thinkers to proliferate ways of inquiry and critique, with both deconstructive as well as normative philosophical projects. We have *The Persistent Corpse* by Wade Wheatley as a wonderful and rich example of the possibilities that literary theory offers to contemporary discourses on the meaning of the body, its expression in our culture, as well as its metaphoric importance for rethinking the boundaries of death and life in war and politics. Eric Powell's *Animythologies* is an articulately written exploration of the conjunction of femininity and animality, taking inspiration from semiotics as well as eco-feminism. Such poetic work maintains its eye towards social transformation all the meanwhile.

We also have *How Can Brandom Get Through to Fodor?* and *Wittgenstein and Dennett on Phenomenological Language* as exemplary pieces of scholarship that provide a close reading of contemporary thinkers while critically putting these thinkers in constructive dialogue. Their authors, Spencer Bailey and Brian Wermcrantz respectively, offer us original (and pleasurably contestable) insights into the conversations into which they are cutting.



The essays selected here are from diverse philosophical backgrounds, positions, and traditions, and yet only represent a fraction of the diverse submissions that we received. The "We" that we are celebrating with the *Geist's* first release is indeed a community of thinkers, but it is not a homogenous and univocal "We." It is a "We" that is necessarily, and desirably so, an ambiguous pronoun, scored through with difference and mutability. Perhaps this should not come as a surprise—that a philosophy journal be so transdisciplinary. Even as it is true that "Philosophy" does often operate to demarcate a particular field ossified by certain conversations, debates, and methodologies, and in a sense represent a real and definitive "discipline," we not need content ourselves with such a depiction. The rules of the discipline can, and indeed are meant to, be broken and put into question by the very rules of the discipline itself.

Now, all of this might seem like a terribly pretentious theoretical displacement I am conducting here. It is a displacement in the sense that I am dislodging the project of philosophy from its comfortably ensconced position within the academy and attempting to provoke its re-emergence nowhere in particular, except perhaps--broadly--all over the humanities and social science map. It is pretentious because asking meta-questions of the semantic quality "what is philosophy?" is becoming something of a faddish cliché, I'm afraid. I think such a displacement is a political and intellectual necessity, however. This editor-in-chief would not urge the journal's contributors and editors to submit their diverse works if I did not think that such a displacement, now characterized as a pedagogical one, is the kind of move that can help secure what studies in the humanities continue to promise: a non-coercive transformation of our intellectual imaginations (to borrow the language of Richard Rorty).

The publication of the *Geist* also comes with an attendant philosophical progeny, then. This progeny is a refutation of the journal's very definition, a resistance to disincarnating the "philosophy" in the journal's subtitle from the irreducibly unique and diverse questions which prompt its genesis. The continuing publication of the *Geist*, undergraduate journal of philosophy, is a continuing commitment to push and permutate the boundaries of undergraduate disciplinary thought away from rigidity and towards persistent questioning for the sake of neither Truth nor Philosophy, but a contesting (and contestable) philosophy.

This has been a wonderful first year for the journal, and I suspect the strength of the *Geist's* editors will remain top-notch and forward thinking as the years proceed. Through difficult financial times and the complicated idiosyncrasies of the editors' lives, we have still managed to put together this edition, which I hope will set a lasting standard of rigorous academic inquiry. On the proceeding pages, I present to you the *Geist* 2008-2009 annual publication.

offering my best wishes to those who have made this a possibility,

kevin duong  
*Geist* editor-in-chief

**Kevin Duong, Editor in Chief**

Kevin is the editor-in-chief of Vanderbilt Geist, as well as co-founder with Spencer Montalvo. He is a senior contract major who enjoys studying contemporary political theory and social thought, feminist theory, human rights, as well as 20th century continental thought (esp. Levinas and Foucault).

His undergraduate thesis, entitled *A Politics of Singularity: Identity, Responsibility, and Storytelling in a New Political Ethics*, engages in a critique of identity politics using diverse methodologies whilst aiming to recuperate ethical possibilities by using practices of storytelling as a philosophical resource. Beginning in Fall 2009, Kevin will be a graduate student at the University of Chicago Masters of Arts program.

**Spencer Montalvo, Managing Editor**

Spencer is the managing editor and division head of Geist, as well as co-founder with Kevin Duong. He enjoys reading philosophy of religion, metaphysics, and political philosophy, but his prime interest is in ethics, especially environmental ethics.

**Daniel Cunningham, Assistant Editor**

Daniel is a sophomore majoring in English and philosophy. He is interested in literary theory, studies of textuality and *écriture*, and all other inquiries into how language and communication shape reality, whether political, historical, ethical, ontological, or otherwise.

**Devan Council, Assistant Editor**

Devan is a sophomore majoring in Philosophy. She is interested in Asian Philosophy as well as Philosophy of Religion.

**Downs Reese, Assistant Editor**

Downs is a senior at Vanderbilt University. He is a double major in Philosophy and Studio Arts. He enjoys Asian Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion, and Aesthetics. He is currently researching and studying the South Asian concept of ahimsa (non-harming).

**Alexa Marcotte, Assistant Editor**

Alexa is a junior majoring in Women's and Gender Studies and Cognitive Studies. She enjoys feminist theory (esp. Cixous), cognitive philosophy, and history. She is also interested in contemporary politics.

**Wade Wheatley, Assistant Editor**

Wade is a Junior majoring in English and minoring in Philosophy. He is interested in literary theory, gender performativity, modalities of ontology, and post-humanism. He plans to use his senior thesis to continue exploring the abject in literature, using both the generative techniques of creative writing and the deconstructive techniques of criticism and theory.

## undergraduate contributors for spring 2009

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# We, the Editors, Having at once Interviewed and not Interviewed Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

by Kevin Duong and Daniel Cunningham

*Itinerary: It is early, the subway station is cold. We dance wearily to avoid the roof-drips. Green train to Brown train to Red train to 116th St. Columbia Univ. We are alone. A rat —“does the rat have a ‘face’?” “Too early.” Time passes, more dripping, still alone. A sign—Green train rerouted take shuttle to Graham Ave. We take shuttle to Graham Ave. Our eyes refuse to adjust to the light, failing with the rest of our basic functions because the hostel did not have a coffee maker. Graham Ave. Station. Go to Bedford Ave., shuttle rerouted says a man in a reflective vest. Why? Improvements are being made. We mumble something about Kafka. We walk.*

The opportunity to interview Gayatri Spivak is, by all accounts, both a privilege and an intellectual treat. When Spivak agreed to a face-to-face interview, we understood that a transcript of such an interview would be invaluable for a new journal. A series of inexplicable developments has unfortunately prevented us from publishing the interview here; the reasons for this will become clear soon enough. For now, we invite our readers to engage with the (non) interview through our own engagements with Spivak’s thought, articulated through substantive citation of our conversation and which we have penned in the following literary and theoretical digression. Since we cannot offer a formal transcript, we at least attempt to offer a homologous interview experience, as perverted and corrupt as the attempt might be. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes by Spivak are of personal correspondence.

We should make clear from the outset that we have not written this with the aim of rebutting or rebuking Spivak on personal comments made without review. We instead seek to interweave our own theoretical interests with a specific kind of fractured narrative that itself refracts our experience of the high-powered interview. This article is, consequently, a combination of our own thoughts, the interview transcript with Spivak, our own personal narrative of the interview days, and a manifestation of our theoretical position inaugurated during the interview itself. Allow us to continue freed from a discipline-bound philosophical style and re-equipped with pointed questions about the work of one of today’s foremost literary theorists and philosophers.

## *I. A Question of Pedagogy*

*“She wants to do the interview at Wendy’s?” says the Columbia student on the train. “Wendy’s at 115<sup>th</sup> and Broadway.” “Hm. I don’t think... No, there’s not a Wendy’s at 116<sup>th</sup> and Broadway.” “What?”*

Our interview with Spivak focused on questions of pedagogy—pedagogies of the subaltern, pedagogy as an epistemological stance, as a commodity, as activism. Discussing the interview later, we returned inescapably to the impression that Spivak approached these questions with disillusionment. Sitting with her at a busy restaurant in Manhattan, amid flocks of cars and people, we could almost watch her sink into the crowd and the noise. For those two hours, she was not a defiant activist or a groundbreaking theorist. She was a humble English teacher—she even corrected our questions’ grammar. And she portrayed herself as such: “All my students will agree—I’ve been teaching for forty-five years—I look upon my teaching as a salaried job.”

*116<sup>th</sup> and Broadway. No Wendy’s. We walk to Columbia’s library, check our email. 156<sup>th</sup>, not 116<sup>th</sup>. Okay.*

Spivak repeatedly recoiled from any general discussion of pedagogy, taking a stance more defeatist than deconstructive: “I can only describe my own experience, if you don’t mind. Do not assume that can be immediately generalized, and I hope that no one who reads this interview will quote me as talking about academic pedagogy in general.” This refusal to generalize, even provisionally, combined with her self-portrayal as a “mere English teacher,” manifested itself in a skeptical separation between her politics and her pedagogy:

In literary pedagogy, we learn how to learn from the singular and the unverifiable, as I’ve said many, many times. Therefore, it’s a bit different. I think I can go that far in terms of the general, but as to academic pedagogy and subaltern pedagogy and responsibility as a cultural imperative? I don’t know.

In this spirit of skepticism, she dismissed both “culture” (“What culture am I speaking about, my Brahminical culture? That’s a piece of nonsense. Or am I speaking about my participation in US culture? What is US culture? I don’t know. Culture for me is a mysterious and useless word.”) and “responsibility” (“I’m not going to be very useful to you [...] In general, I’m not a person who thinks a lot about that big difficult word, ‘responsibility.’ [...] So in all of this—who is responsible for what—I let the philosophers do it. That’s not something I can say anything about.”). Her restricted stance on these two issues left the related issue of pedagogy unworthy of even a positive definition.

*“Is that her?” “Where?” “There.” “I don’t think so, go ask.” “You ask.” “You.” “Fine.”*

Despite such skepticism, Spivak’s words contained a strong undercurrent committed to political action. In every case, though, she masked all romanticism, even every positive claim, with resignation. She spoke at length about her “second job,” which she has held for two decades but rarely discusses, training teachers in South Asia. At first, she said, she “thought that there was a big difference between the two things”—between her work in Asia and America. Then her two jobs became more connected for her: “for a few years I thought that my work in the United States was instrumental in making possible my work in South Asia.” But their connection was for Spivak neither academic nor political; it was financial: “since I wanted to keep my relative independence as an intellectual so I could do what I wanted to do, it was very useful to have a dollar salary, because in those areas a little goes a long way.” She eventually concluded that her two jobs complement each other in ways not merely financial: “the other kind of work helps me doing this kind of work.” Still, in her words



and her voice, she seemed to be giving a job performance evaluation, not discussing a political mission to which she has devoted her life.

*“Not her. That was awkward.”*

Spivak’s opinions on the role of pedagogy present such challenges because they appear contradictory. It seems unthinkable that she could spend a lifetime working so diligently, so passionately, for a pursuit that is merely “vocational.” But these are her words. We must use her paradoxes as entry points for understanding.

*“That’s her, there she is. Hello, Prof. Spivak it’s an honor to meet you thank you for agreeing to...”*

The underlying paradox that fuels our difficulty is epistemological. We received a rebuke from Spivak when we spoke of knowledge as a commodity and the university as a factory with a specific socioeconomic role in capitalist society, though we believed we were paraphrasing Spivak’s own early work. “The shaping of the question is too politically naïve,” she said. She had in part missed the point of our words. In referring to knowledge as a product and a commodity, we spoke somewhat facetiously. We were not referring approvingly or disapprovingly to the possibility of transcendent truth, not trying really to address epistemology. We were discussing the role society dictates to the university, which is to produce “facts” and “ideas” that tell everyone else how to think. In accord with Spivak’s own writings, we meant to suggest the university’s protocol in this task often submits to the demands of the economy by reinforcing capitalism.

*“Is the computer working? Plug in the microphone.” “Yes, we should be ready. Question one.” “Wait, don’t read the question, we’ll just stick each one on a separate audio track...”*

Spivak’s response nonetheless makes us think. “It seems to me the university does not produce knowledge, it trains you how to know,” she said. “The university produces a mind that knows how to know.” She has left the economic metaphor intact: the university still “produces” something. But “knowledge” here seems to exist separately from the knowing subject. Clearly Spivak is not making an argument for transcendent truth; this would contradict far too much of what she has written, ignore her affinities with Nietzsche, Marx, Derrida and Foucault, and return us to the nineteenth century. But her description of the university’s task suspiciously resembles Socrates’ self-designation as a “midwife for knowledge,” leading his disciples benevolently toward the upper realms of Truth.

*“That was good, we have it. Wait. Why won’t it save?” “It was saving earlier... This is silly, is it because it’s on a PC instead of a Mac? That was why the microphone wasn’t working this morning, right?... Do it later, we need to hurry.”*

As often when reading Spivak, we should turn to the place of the subaltern in her work. Let us extend a quote already used, now reinserting Spivak’s reference to her work in Bangladesh and India:

All my students will agree—I’ve been teaching for forty-five years—I look upon my teaching as a salaried job, and over there I look upon my teaching as having imperatives coming from the huge problems of even understanding what they are. So it’s very limited, you know what I mean?

The problem of how properly to deal with the subaltern here appears as an epistemological problem—"the huge problems of even understanding what they are." This observation corresponds in a related way to Spivak's own definition of subalternity, "those who are removed from lines of social mobility" (Spivak 2005, 147). The subaltern space is again an epistemological space, a space by definition inaccessible to Western knowledge mechanisms. Spivak iterates in our interview another way in which the subaltern's existence is, so to speak, epistemologically deficient: "What happens in subalternity is that the folks think that their terrible, wretched condition is *normal*. It's quite unlike situations in which people think they're fighting against colonialism, etc. It's much more like Dubois than Fanon." Speaking of spaces of subalternity is not to say that the subaltern subject herself is just a question of epistemology. While there certainly is an epistemic discontinuity in relating to the subaltern, her position is also a question of agency, itself very much a function of political economy.

*"That was good, we're almost finished. I'm still worried we can't save. Let me look at it. Here, I fixed it. It has to be stopped to save." "Oh, good, we're fine, then."*

"I look upon my teaching as having imperatives coming from the huge problems of even understanding what they are." Notice the juxtaposition of epistemological and ethical: "understanding" is inseparable from "imperatives." Spivak feels an ethical call toward those she helps in India and Pakistan, and this call first manifests itself as a command to try to know. "The effort required for the subaltern to enter into organic intellectuality is ignored by our desire to have our cake and eat it too: that we can continue to be as we are, and yet be in touch with the speaking subaltern," she said in a 1993 interview. Even the way in which she serves them is a kind of epistemic aid; by giving subalterns the power to teach each other, she integrates them into the structures through which knowledge and capital circulate in the modern world, opening the possibility of repositioning or displacing their subalternity.

*"Why is that light blinking? Oh, that's my computer battery. It should be charging, I don't know what's wrong. Do you think Wendy's cares if we use their wall charge?" We proceed to wrap the computer power cable around the table to the wall, awkwardly trapping ourselves and Spivak between the stretched cable to the wall, the table, and computers. All party members are oddly nonplussed about the arrangement.*

The question clearly does not even exist for Spivak whether or not these knowledge structures are "true." What matters is their ethical implication: Through initiation into the prevailing global knowledge/power framework, these people can begin to exist as ethical subjects for those who, whether knowingly or not, oppress them. The real, human suffering of the subaltern overflows theoretical tapdances to the tune of interfering with sacred cultural norms. Only by beginning with epistemic action, Spivak has found, can concerned parties like her hope to end this suffering. The difficulty of this task, which she told us "is almost insurmountable" should account largely for her apparent defeatism.

*Well, that's all the questions we have. I think that went well, thank you again. We'll type up the transcript and meet you for dinner to edit? Yes, for dinner, same Wendy's. You must finish the transcript today. We will, we will.*

## II. “Applied Deconstruction”

If you have read my stuff—and you have, since you were kind enough to come to question me—you see that I am not a very great proponent of “applied deconstruction.” So I don’t really think about the deconstructive task or anything. I just say that this situation produces this task, and it is indeed something like a double bind [...] because you’re fighting at the same time as you are welcoming.

But what is deconstruction if not applied? Is it a doctrine, a metaphysics that suspects both the beyond (*meta*) and everything resembling a physics, an anti-metaphysics functioning as a metaphysics? Is it an argumentative strategy? (Or, as impatient interviewers have sometimes decided, a means of evading questions?) Spivak herself has used it as a way of reading. She applies it—her own version of it, of course—repeatedly to Marx and Freud and to writers of fiction such as Margaret Drabble (“Feminism and Critical Theory,” 1986). In the latter case she attempts “to use literature, with a feminist perspective, as a ‘nonexpository’ theory of practice” (85). But if deconstruction is nothing more than a new way to read, is Spivak not operating with a strict binary between world and text, between truth and fiction, whose annulment is prerequisite to deconstruction?

To answer we must explain our terms, “world” and “text.” Explain—not define, for any definition that could function would be only provisional, considering the breadth of Spivak’s work and the breadth of these terms. To explain, to defend: Spivak, in arguing for a “non-applied” deconstruction, must depart from Derrida by positing a distinction between reading the world as text, as framed and stationary, and structuring our actions in the world as it moves and lives. There is nothing outside the text, she agrees, but this world-as-text forever contains the potential for being non-text, is always poised to become something other than text, and it is this never realized becoming which we must address in a non-deconstructive way. Put bluntly, we have a view of textuality as a function of time, as a historical state of completedness *or* non-completedness, perhaps a legitimate view but certainly not the only view. (Also, we must note, not a view Spivak herself has endorsed).

In this case, however, we can easily deconstruct the binary of text and non-text through Derrida’s deconstruction of “the event,” which Spivak cites often. It quickly emerges that all separations between past and future, text and world, inside and outside, are merely provisional, are moments of *textuality* which we construct in order to live and believe we understand. There truly is nothing outside the text, even that vague realm of potential non-text which the text forever points toward, for even this potentiality exists only subjectively *as text*. The binary has folded in upon itself: if there are acts, reading is an act, and we cannot isolate the moment in which living-as-reading gives birth to living-as-acting. Each becomes the other, relies on the other, has always already been the other. To be succinct: what are we doing with deconstruction if not applying it?

Yes, Spivak might say, but all of this is only true if we have already accepted the possibility of applied deconstruction. Without such acceptance we cannot even apply this logic to applied deconstruction, because Spivak’s negation of the concept, she might say, already exists in the realm of application, a realm that already excludes deconstruction. In turn we would again deconstruct this separation of realms, perhaps

again to be spurned, and would be in a bind as infantile as that of solipsism.

Such a spiral is less important than the fact that Spivak herself has argued for the deconstruction of world and text, of reader and text:

The disjunctive, discontinuous metaphor of the subject, carrying and being carried by its burden of desire, does systematically misguide and constitute the machine of the text, carrying and being carried by its burden of "figuration." One cannot escape it by dismissing the former as the residue of a productive cut, and valorizing the latter as the only possible concern of a "philosophical" literary criticism. This opposition too, between subject "metaphor" and text "metaphor," needs to be indefinitely deconstructed rather than hierarchized ("The Letter as Cutting Edge," 1977, 13).

Earlier on the same page, Spivak argues that the reader cannot dominate the text, cannot do whatever she wants with it, because "the general sense in which the text and the person share a common structure would make criticism itself absolutely vulnerable" (13). The reader must open an economy with the text in which she allows it coherence of meaning to the degree that she herself needs coherence of meaning as a person. In both claims Spivak acknowledges that the distinction between text and reader, as the reader supposedly acts in moving, non-textual time, is provisional. The reader as a person independent of the act of reading is nevertheless always reading herself, and only with this act of reading the past does the future exist for her. It is always her desire for selfhood that constitutes her, and this desire acts through reading. In this case, text and world can appear as separate only provisionally, and their separation must serve to make possible an act of reading in bad faith, an act of reading disguised as acting, a program that opens itself to deconstruction.

More curiously, Spivak herself seems repeatedly to have embraced something like applied deconstruction. She demonstrates this best in her biographical-theoretical essay "Explanation and Culture: Marginalia." Here Spivak recounts her experience at an academic conference early in her career. Recognizing her own essentialism, she positions herself as "feminist" and "deconstructivist," an intentionally marginal role, for "that which is at the center often hides a repression" (103-104). Despite invitations to dismiss her obstinacy, to leave her post as gadfly and participate in the "real" object of the conference, Spivak insists on maintaining her marginality:

The only way I can hope to suggest how the center itself is marginal is by not remaining outside in the margin and pointing my accusing finger at the center. I might do it rather by implicating myself in that center and sensing what politics make it marginal. Since one's vote is at the limit for oneself, the deconstructivist can use herself (assuming one is at one's own disposal) as a shuttle between the center (inside) and the margin (outside) and thus narrate a displacement (107).

This is scripture for anything we might call "applied deconstruction." Spivak has transferred Derrida's reversal-displacement methodology, if in a distilled form, to small-scale activism, to academia. She has cast her own politics as the difference which allows the politics of the conference to function, thereby preventing it from donning the

apolitical façade which makes its functioning possible as an exertion of its socioeconomic role in society. The terms at work here are not signs but people, political agents in the realm of real human action.

We could extrapolate Spivak's place at the conference to characterize her career in general, her own itinerary. One of the first and loudest Eastern/Western scholars, she has contributed to the vast displacement of East/West hierarchies, raising the question of what sociopolitical repressions and necessities have made it necessary not only to hierarchize the two but to posit them as separate at all. She has repeatedly answered this question, especially in her writings on Marxist economic theory, by describing Western capitalism's need to efface the locus of the Eastern subaltern. Her performative deconstruction of the theory/praxis dichotomy follows the same pattern.

But it is useless to illuminate inconsistencies. We might even defend her by deconstructing that word, "Spivak." What does it mean? What conditions might make its unified meaning possible, and do those conditions exist? As always, justifications proliferate. What is clear is that, if we read Spivak's stuff, which we have, we see that her career is a masterly study in the art of applied deconstruction. Equally clear is the conclusion that if we deconstruct Spivak's denial of this art, we see that such a negation must rely on non-deconstructive logic. All deconstruction is applied deconstruction, because we can do nothing with it but apply it, and any fundamental difference between those things to which we might apply it and those things toward which we cannot is provisional, is itself subject to indefinite deconstruction. Thus emerges the question truly at play: why is Spivak herself not using an applied deconstruction here? It is not as if she is simply failing to think deconstructively, as if she is not keeping deconstruction somewhere in the background of her thoughts. So, then, we might ask: what is it, in this context where she suggests that she does not encourage applied deconstruction, that resists deconstruction? (Or what makes deconstruction inappropriate?)

*We find a quiet coffee shop. We turn on the computer, find the file, begin file transfer. "I'm getting food." "Okay." "Wait—the computer says it's battery is low, please recharge." "It's plugged in, it should be charging." "It's not." "How much time?" "It just died." "Did we get the file?" "I don't know, let me try." We try the USB drive on our other computer. The file is incomplete, it won't open. "The charger must have gone bad. What do we do?"*

### *III. The (non-) Question of Responsibility*

In general, I'm not a person who thinks a lot about that big difficult word, "responsibility." I mean, I think sometimes about reflexes, and I hope that the way I try to train myself and others helps in the production of reflexes, about which I do not speak much because I don't think I'm trained to speak about those things... So in all of this—who is responsible for what—I let the philosophers do it. That's not something I can say anything about. What imperatives are coming from a culture? I let the anthropologists tell me. I'm a great believer in disciplinary divisions. This is a double bind in interdisciplinarity, as I was saying before—the relationship between structuring and resisting structure. So you have to be able to acknowledge that your desire to be interdisciplinary is based on one kind of



disciplinary training, which means epistemological formation, and you construct your object in one way. This is something that I believe after all these years is *safe*. For others.

Why leave responsibility to the philosophers; what does it mean to let philosophers "do it"? It matters not whether we engage with this comment by Spivak in (or out of) context--such a comment can, and should, pose the question of responsibility in relation to the academic subject. We will engage with this question, and not through deflection or displacement, or digressive stream of consciousness (as our writing thus far suggests), nor necessarily even deconstruction, but as directly as we can. Such direct engagement with the question of responsibility is more than just an academic nicety. There is no relationship between theory and practice, no talk of normativity and deconstruction, and no political critique, *unless* there is also the question of responsibility for the academic subject.

We could adopt a superficial interpretation of Spivak's words, the interpretation that Spivak is not concerned with the notion of responsibility and would rather leave such questions to other disciplines. Hence the allusion to Philosophy and Anthropology. This interpretation is not only largely useless, but it is also implausible. As an academic-activist who dedicates considerable time to ground-level activism and emancipatory pedagogical strategies in the very places which provide her work its "epistemological thrust," we cannot help seeking a theory of responsibility within such activism. We must proceed, then, with a question: why is the question of responsibility to be left to the philosophers, given that responsibility is also, at the same time, the obsessed question of all academic disciplines (except, according to our interview with Spivak, business schools)? We doubt it is because the discipline of philosophy has the specific methodological tools to engage with the question; at the least, it might not necessarily be in a better position than any other discipline. All disciplines, as Spivak echoes Derrida in her introduction to *Of Grammatology*, employ as their methodological tool a kind of "bricolage"...

At this juncture, let us go ahead and suggest that the over-rehearsed debate between the moral skeptic and the advocate for an account of responsibility (which largely is wedded to the mainstream moral philosophy conversation) will not help us much in commingling our own thoughts with Spivak's. That conversation, suffering death by a thousand qualifications about which organizing principles and values system might govern it, while productive in the academy, is not a conversation that teaches us about what it means to *live* responsibility, to live theory in such a way as to find it superfluous to address its own theoretical justification. When we speak of responsibility here, we are not conflating it with obligation, a binding relation that lives on its noetic status that masquerades within vague and contestable notions of "freedom." In turn, we also are not talking about the question of "Why be responsible?" as if an answer will be deductively contiguous with the question.

How are we to understand responsibility in our interview with Spivak, then? For the moment, we can return to the problem of applied deconstruction: why does Spivak not take deconstruction as something applied, when it clearly represents a methodology always caught in the act of application? Scrutinize closely her sentiment: "you see that I am not a very great proponent of applied deconstruction. So I don't really think about

the deconstructive task or anything. I just say that this situation *produces* this task, and it is indeed something like a double bind [...] because you're fighting at the same time as you are welcoming" (personal correspondence, emphasis added). Something immediately should come to mind: how does a given situation *produce* a task? The production of a task necessitates that some kind of movement, some kind of reading, is already at work, that a reading subject is involved. This is the movement of deconstruction, we argue, in the moment of Spivak's utterance. It is *not* the strict and narrow methodology of deconstruction that enthusiastic English professors might endorse when introducing the technique to students of literary theory. The apparent tension within Spivak's own comments in fact gestures toward a distinctly *normative* dimension to the always already applied movement of deconstruction.

Given that deconstruction can be nothing but applied, and given Spivak's denial that she encourages the application of deconstruction, one way of reading her comments on the *production* of tasks suggests two related thoughts that will help us approach the question of responsibility. These two thoughts are that Spivak has allowed deconstruction to transmogrify itself into a literary praxis, and that tracing through any application of deconstruction is a dimension of normativity. We do not *apply* deconstruction, but rather we *live* it as a praxis, and by living it thus, we read material social and political dilemmas through the critical lens of literary criticism. The living of deconstruction as a theory of praxis, which is a reading made plausible given Spivak's activism, means that her approaches to a particular situation—"singular and unverifiable"—will indeed produce a normative task, but this normative task is immediately beset by a double bind—that of both using and resisting structure.

We are suggesting that the application of deconstruction does not *only* "deconstruct," because for each application, a normative task is produced that crosses itself in its own emergence. This normativity makes possible the task of deconstruction, if we continue to understand it as a theory of praxis and activism and *not* a limited theory of literary criticism (indeed, Derrida explicitly suggests the former). In addition, this normative task produced by deconstruction is immediately scored through with a specific tension. Although our conversation with Spivak indicates this tension is the dynamic antagonism between structure and resistance to structure, we propose that this tension can also be understood as an ambivalence towards the question of responsibility. Within the alleged "chaos" and "meaninglessness" of textuality is a command to normativity that harbors within itself a *command* to responsibility.

*We carry the interview audio file, inaccessible, around New York for three hours. Radio Shack cannot help us. Circuit City cannot help us. Best Buy cannot help us. PCRichards cannot help us. Curtis Camera cannot help us. None of the people studying at Starbucks or Borders or the Columbia Library can help us...*

To live theory and philosophy that takes *praxis* as its fundamental disciplinary thrust—this is what Spivak has done, and this is what we will label a theory of normativity (without norms) embedded/embroiled within the practice of applied deconstruction. This theory is normativity without norms because the normativity that deconstruction mutely points us toward is not a prescriptive, fully rationalized normativity, supported precariously by reason. This normativity is an intertwining of a theory of knowledge with a theory of action—the intertwining of epistemology and praxis. This new framing of deconstruction as a normative theory that begs the

question of responsibility, and by extension questions of social justice, permits us to see that what may initially have seemed a concealment of the application of deconstruction for Spivak is actually a disclosure of the normative dimension within deconstruction, albeit under the diction of "reflexes."

Although we have been calling responsibility a question, always being issued and replenished as deconstruction continues to remain in play, responsibility for Spivak really is a non-question as well. Living deconstruction as praxis both provokes the question of responsibility and posits an answer to the question, although in a discontinuous fashion: deconstruction produces the task/question of responsibility even as it suffocates the question with the command "be responsible" to others who call you before will. Spivak writes, "The responsibility I speak of, then, is not necessarily the one that comes from the consciousness of superiority lodged in the self...but one that is, to begin with, sensed before sense as a call of the other" (Spivak 2005, 152). Again, the task produced by deconstruction is this double-bind of answering to responsibility and already having answered the command—put differently, to use structure and resist structure, to want to violate responsibility while restraining oneself before the other by the interdiction of that very responsibility.

Deconstruction, for Spivak and for us, is more than an applied theory. Lived as praxis, as a discipline with its own "thrust," deconstruction signals living responsibility such that the non-question of responsibility delimits a difficult terrain between ethics and politics—what Spivak herself has labeled to be an *aporia*. It is within this difficult terrain that the activist resides, and it is into this terrain that Spivak's denial of using applied deconstruction invites us to enter.

*The sun is setting. Businesses are closing. If we could open the file right now, we would have exactly thirty-four minutes and one computer to type the hour-long transcript. We call Spivak. She is very busy, we have to do it tonight. We can't do it tonight. She's very sorry. Somewhere, Kafka laughs endearingly.*

We have come full circle, in a way. Responsibility is not a faddish dimension of "ethical turns," and it is not the self-serving obsession of academics excusing themselves from their activist duties. It is also not something "to be left to the philosophers" because of some disciplinary deflection. It is not a distracting question that cannot be productively engaged by deconstruction, either. It lies as the precondition for all inquiry in the humanities and social sciences; we write and we think, we theorize normatively as we deconstruct, because we intend to live theory and responsibility in such a way as to split open persistently the question of theoretical justification for that very responsibility. The danger of deflecting the question of responsibility to the philosophers is not in the abnegation of the question but in the conscious crossing of oneself in the moment of deflection.

Theodor Adorno writes in *Minima Moralia* that "the secret of justice in love is the annulment of all rights, to which love mutely points." We're afraid it will be necessary to depart slightly from Adorno. It is such that justice in love is neither on the level of *right*, nor on the level of *freedom*, nor is it a mere function of pedagogy. If we find the secret of justice in love anywhere, we find it in responsibility, in my being-for-you, in my suspension before you such that responsibility continues to be archived in me, never complete and thus never directly accessible. Spivak asks us to take the risk to "other" ourselves, to hold ourselves to literary scrutiny. I do not know any other way to describe

such a recommendation than in the terms, if often vague and contestable, of responsibility. To have my self allocated to me by an other who installs the question of responsibility in me; to have I → You → I, to be as two hands touching, two lips touching, intertwining and opening upon the other... academic and text, colonial subject and metropolitan diaspora, educator and subaltern—we do not, and in fact *cannot*, think of these themes but through the mediation of the question of responsibility. This intertwining is perhaps why Spivak seems to find the discussion of responsibility so contrived. Asking the question of responsibility falsely signals that there is a space between theory and practice, as if that space is not already always being deconstructed by the very *fact* that we live and act upon the question of responsibility.

It has taken us this long to say that for responsibility to be left to the philosophers is to claim that *we are all philosophers*, an assignment to ourselves that cannot be answered by way of evasion, even if the temptation for theoretical deflection or displacement appears to loom greater with each repressive gesture of history.

*The universe is absurd and chaotic. We sit briefly on the sidewalk, stupefied by our situation. We buy ice cream (chocolate chip cookie dough) and walk to Greenwich Village. Night has fallen. We sit on a park bench together in quiet, watching young men and women laughing and talking because they do not know the universe is absurd and chaotic. We begin to talk. It was really a fascinating interview, we will have to think about what she said. You're sure we can't publish? We really can't. We have to publish something, we flew all the way to New York. What can we publish? What do we have? I don't know. Not much, I suppose... What if we wrote an article?*

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# Animythologies

## On Animality and Femininity in Philosophical and Scientific Discourse

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Abstract: In this essay I use Evelyn Fox Keller's analysis in *Reflections on Gender and Science* of the conjunction of science and masculinity in "three moments in Western intellectual history" as a point of departure to begin to analyze the conjunction of femininity and animality in these same discourses. These include Plato's epistemology, Francis Bacon's imagery in formulating scientific methodology, and I add Rene Descartes' *Meditations*. In the second half I attempt to delimit a domain of semiology that would target the analysis of sign-systems that deploy the concept of animality as a politico-epistemological tool, which I have named animythology. Finally, I appeal to ecofeminism as offering a possibility of liberation from exploitation for both women and other species.

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The first section of Evelyn Fox Keller's *Reflections on Gender and Science* deals with the historically phallogentric discourses constitutive to the development of modern science. In order to demonstrate this conjunction of science and masculinity Keller elaborates upon "three moments in Western intellectual history, exhibiting three alternative relations to and perspectives of nature that have been present in the prehistory and early history of science. Each is illustrative of a different science-gender system."<sup>1</sup> These three moments include: gender and sexuality in the discourse of Platonic epistemology, the discourse of masculine power and domination in Francis Bacon's, and the sexual politics of the Royal Society. By further examining the first two of these three moments I hope to establish the historical conjunction of femininity and animality<sup>2</sup>—focusing, like Keller, on the discourse vital to the development of science in the modern period, in order to attempt to access the underlying socio-historical mechanisms by which current identities of gender and of species have become normalized.

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<sup>1</sup> *Reflections on Gender and Science*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 18-19, 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition, 1<sup>st</sup> printing 1985.

<sup>2</sup> Animality here is being used, like femininity, to denote a socially constructed, institutionally and structurally transmitted conceptual formation.



### *Animality and femininity in Platonic epistemology*

In the first of these three science-gender systems, Keller explores Plato's use of sexual language and imagery to express the process of attaining knowledge. This is important because the use of sex as a metaphor for knowledge continues from Plato into the modern period through Bacon and the Royal Society, and, as noted by Sandra Harding, continues to inform scientific language and methodology in the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> Plato is also important in that he was "the first writer in Western intellectual history to make explicit and systematic use of the language of sexuality for knowing."<sup>4</sup> However, it is not only the discourse of sexuality that Plato uses epistemologically—it is also the discourse of animality. Specifically, before *noesis*, or true knowledge, is attainable the animal within the *psyche* must be conquered, dominated, and ultimately destroyed.

Keller draws heavily on Plato's *Phaedrus*, mostly from Socrates' speech in which he develops the famous chariot analogy for the soul. This passage, while presenting Plato's language of sexuality, is also one of the most vivid and startling examples of Plato's use of the human/animal dichotomy. "Let it be likened" Socrates explains, "to the union of powers in a team of winged steeds and their winged charioteer...[w]ith us men...one of [the steeds] is noble and good, and of good stock, while the other has the opposite character, and his stock is opposite. Hence the task of our charioteer is difficult and troublesome."<sup>5</sup> To align this with the three parts of the soul, the charioteer is the mind, or reasoning part of the soul, the good steed is the spirited part, or the passions (which aid the reasoning part), while the bad steed is the body, or the desiring (i.e. lustful desire for bodily pleasure) part of the soul.<sup>6</sup> It is important to note here that the only *human* part of the soul in the chariot analogy is the mind, or that which reasons—all else is animal. That is, to be human is to reason, and all that is unreasonable (of the body or emotions) is animal. Hence, animality is for Plato an epistemological tool through which he constitutes what is essential to the human subject. But this is not the only function of animality in Plato—it is also used politically in order to differentiate those beings, characteristics, actions, etc., which are less than human. That is, once the animal has been established as the other, as the not-human, it can be deployed politically as a concept in various sign-systems. This is where femininity and animality

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. "Contemporary Images" from *The Science Question in Feminism*, 119.

<sup>4</sup> Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 21.

<sup>5</sup> *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, Ed. Edith Hamilton, *Phaedrus* translated by R. Hackforth (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, Tenth printing, 1980 (first printing 1961)), 246a-246b. One might object here that Plato is also using the concept of animality also to signify a necessary part of acquiring knowledge because the soul must grow wings before it can transcend earthly existence. However, the soul's wings are not functioning here within the concept of animality; they are functioning within the limits of divinity (think also of angels, of the dove as the Holy Spirit, etc.). Birds (albeit birds of a specific kind, i.e. white (doves), birds of the day as opposed to birds of the night—basically those which are in line with the rest of the dominant codes) represent the ouranian realm. In contradistinction, animality is almost always limited to the chthonic realm.

<sup>6</sup> This is most extensively constructed by Plato in the *Republic*.

collide in Plato.<sup>7</sup> Specifically, when the two lovers, the *erastes* and the *eromenos*, teacher and student, are unable to conquer (through reason) their physical attraction to one another they succumb to their inner animality. Plato's depiction of the *erastes* attempting to dominate his bodily animality<sup>8</sup> is graphically clear, and worth quoting at some length:

Now when the driver [charioteer] beholds the person of the beloved...[the bad steed, or the bodily desire] heeding no more the driver's goad or whip, leaps and dashes on, sorely troubling his companion [the good steed] and his driver...For a while they struggle...but at last...they yield and agree to do his bidding. And so he draws them on, and now they are quite close and behold the spectacle of the beloved flashing upon them. At that sight the driver's memory goes back to that form of beauty...and therewith is compelled to pull the reins so violently that he brings both steeds down on their haunches...[but the bad steed] struggling and neighing and pulling until he compels them a second time to approach the beloved...with head down and tail stretched out he takes the bit between his teeth and shamelessly plunges on. But the driver, with resentment even stronger than before...jerks back the bit in the mouth of the wanton horse with an even stronger pull, bespatters his railing tongue and his jaws with blood, and forcing him down on legs and haunches delivers him over to anguish.<sup>9</sup>

Keller notes the conjunction of animality and femininity: "Indeed, the surrender to physical desire reduces homosexual Eros to the status of heterosexual, or animal, desire."<sup>10</sup> But we must make no mistake—heterosexuality is rejected as an authentic form of desire insofar as it is a behavior of non-human animals. It is of the body, which is animal, rather than of the mind, which is proper to humanity and divinity. Again, Keller catches the conjunction yet, not fully because "animal" in the passage quoted above is functioning in the same sense as it is in Plato. She has recognized that heterosexual acts are for Plato equivalent to animal acts, they serve the function of reproduction, not true love—which can occur only between the *erastes* and the *eromenos*. Ultimately, Keller has deciphered only one side of Plato's conjunction of animality and femininity. In

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<sup>7</sup> It is not just femininity which Plato conjoins with animality but also slave classes, the *hoi polloi* or those not of "noble stock" (the proletariat), other non-Hellenic races, or "barbarians", etc (e.g. Republic IX-X). That is, animality is a tool not only of masculine domination, but also of bourgeois domination, racial domination, etc. It would seem that animality is a universal tool in power-knowledge relations. This essay will be limited primarily to the conjunction of femininity and animality, however.

<sup>8</sup> We should also recognize here Plato's description of the two steeds: "[The steed] that is on the more honorable side is upright and clean-limbed, carrying his neck high, with something of a hooked nose; in color he is white, with black eyes; a lover of glory [e.g. timocrat], but with temperance and modesty; one that consorts with genuine renown, and needs no whip, being driven by the word of command alone. The other is crooked of frame, a massive jumble of a creature, with thick short neck, snub nose, black skin, and gray eyes; hot-blooded, consorting with wantonness and vainglory; shaggy of ear, deaf, and hard to control with whip and goad" (253d-253e, emphasis added). Here we clearly see animality functioning in a racial context.

<sup>9</sup> The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Ed. Edith Hamilton, Phaedrus, translated by R. Hackforth (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, Tenth printing, 1980 (first printing 1961)), 254a-e.

<sup>10</sup> Keller, Reflections on Gender and Science, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 24.

the last section we will explore how animality, as an epistemological tool, is function simultaneously on two levels, but now we must turn with Keller to Francis Bacon and his new scientific method.

### *Animality and femininity in the discourse of modernity*

Keller notes that Bacon carries on the Platonic use of sexual language and metaphor for acquiring knowledge. Yet, whereas for Plato epistemology depended upon the equality of eros between the erastes and the eromenos, for Bacon the sexual metaphor becomes one of domination and exploitation—or, power-over. Hence, she quotes Bacon, “I am come in very truth leading to you Nature with all her children to bind her to your service and make her your slave.”<sup>11</sup> Keller doesn’t question what Bacon means by Nature’s “children.” It becomes clear upon reflection, however, that this would be referring to animal life. Another passage, which Keller goes on to quote, establishes the conjunction more clearly by combining metaphors of sexual domination and the bourgeois sport of hunting. “For you have but to follow and as it were hound nature in her wanderings, and you will be able, when you like, to lead and drive her afterwards to the same place again.”<sup>12</sup> Not only is nature portrayed here as female, but also as a feral animal, wandering in the wilderness, which has to be hunted down. Much like Plato, animality and femininity are closely conjoined for Bacon. To establish the connection between domination of women and non-human animals more fully, however, I will turn to one of Bacon’s contemporaries and also an important figure in shaping the discourse of modernity, Rene Descartes.

Much like Plato, Descartes associated the mind and reason with masculinity while defining the body (as that which man has in common with “brutes”) as animal. For Descartes, proving that non-human animals had no soul was fundamental to establishing his substance dualism. “For next to the error of those who deny God, which I think I have already sufficiently refuted, there is none which is more effectual in leading feeble spirits from the straight path of virtue, than to imagine that the soul of the brute is of the same nature as our own, and that in consequence, after this life we have nothing to fear or to hope for, any more than the flies and ants.”<sup>13</sup> This corresponds to Descartes’ program in the *Meditations*, which in many ways inaugurated the discourse of modern philosophy; he explains this program clearly in the dedicatory letter to the Sorbonne which serves as a preface to the work: his hope is that “there will be no one left in the world who will dare to call into doubt either the existence of God or the real distinction between the human soul and body.”<sup>14</sup> Yet, as we have seen, the distinction between the human soul and body that Descartes is attempting to establish depends upon a qualitative distinction between humanity and animality. In fact, Descartes’

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> René Descartes, “Animals are Machines” In *Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence*, eds. S. J. Armstrong and R. G. Botzler (New York: McGraw-Hill), 1993, 281-285.

<sup>14</sup> Descartes, *Meditations*, in *Modern Philosophy*, edited by Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann, Fifth Edition, (New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2008), 15.

*Meditations* not only depends upon this distinction, but indeed, upon final analysis, presupposes it—despite his avowed methodological skepticism. This becomes clear in the second meditation in which Descartes hopes to fully establish his substance dualism. He has just defined the world and all the bodies and entities contained within it, using the ball of wax as an example, as *res extensa*. Yet, we could ask, why is extension the essence of the world? Why is this more essential than temporality, for example? Descartes answers:

So let us proceed, and consider on what occasion my perception of the nature of the wax was more perfect and evident. Was it when I first looked at it, and believed I knew it by my external senses, or at least by what they call the ‘common’ sense—that is, the power of imagination? Or is my knowledge more perfect now, after a more careful investigation of the nature of the wax and of the means by which it is known? Any doubt on this issue would clearly be foolish; for what distinctness was there in my earlier perception? Was there anything in it which an animal could not possess? But when I distinguish the wax from its outward forms—take the clothes off, as it were, and consider it naked—then although my judgement may still contain errors, at least my perception now requires a human mind.<sup>15</sup>

Descartes’ world as *res extensa* is clearly predicated upon an idea of the human defined in opposition to animality. We could, for example, ask Descartes a simple question: Which animal? We can easily predict his answer as well, for it would be *any animal*—which reveals how this term is functioning in a purely negative capacity, just as it is in Plato and in Keller. Animality is simply the negation of humanity (and divinity, for reason, that which makes us human, is the “divine spark” within us). We must also notice how Descartes continues, in this same passage, the sexual discourse for acquiring knowledge. One must consider a body or entity “naked” in order to gain any real understanding of it. This offers further evidence of how closely the concepts of animality and femininity are intertwined. Hopefully through these examples the status of animality as a politico-epistemological tool has become clear. It remains to show how this tool is used to construct social norms of gender and species, and further how these norms are used to justify and perpetuate domination and exploitation.

#### *Animality as politico-epistemological tool*

The use of animality as an epistemological tool has important political consequences, but in order to extract these consequences to the fullest degree we must use, for reasons that will become apparent, a certain kind of analysis. Taking our departure from Barthes, we can postulate a specific kind of myth—that is, a semiological system—involving animality as politico-epistemological tool. Myths in which the concept, or signified, animality is given content in order to fulfill (a) political function(s). Insofar as we can call this a specific genre or domain of myth, which is surely justified due to the sheer quantity and near ubiquity in the West of discourses deploying the concept animality, we can invent a neologism to name this domain: *animythology*. Mythical speech, following Barthes, “is a message. It is therefore by no means confined to oral speech. It can consist of modes of writing or of representations;

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 26.

not only written discourse, but also photography, cinema, reporting, sport, shows, publicity, all these can serve as a support to mythical speech.”<sup>16</sup> The same can be said truly of animythical speech, for there is seemingly no discursive field in which animality is not deployed. Moreover, “myth has in fact a double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us.”<sup>17</sup> This double function is exactly the point of interest in examining animyths, as in myths generally. We will return to this, but first let us look at an example of animythology.

Let us take for an example Peter Paul Rubens 1599 painting *Leda with Swan*, for not only is the conjunction of animality and femininity explicit in this work (in more way than one), but Rubens is also contemporary with Bacon and Descartes; he is moreover a seminal figure in the birth of the Baroque period at the turn of the seventeenth century.



Peter Paul Rubens, *Leda with Swan*, 1599<sup>18</sup>

*Leda with Swan* is appropriate also in that it captures Greek views of sexuality, which were discussed in the context of Platonic epistemology. Zeus, in order to satisfy his bodily lust for Leda, metamorphoses himself into a swan. He had to become-animal in order to engage in heterosexual intercourse. Animythology is functioning on several

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<sup>16</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 110.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

<sup>18</sup> Accessed online, March 29, 2008, [http://www.reproarte.com/picture/Peter+Paul\\_Rubens/Leda+with+swan/9642.html](http://www.reproarte.com/picture/Peter+Paul_Rubens/Leda+with+swan/9642.html)



levels here. Firstly, we must examine Zeus's becoming-swan. The signifier is divinity/masculinity (Zeus), which occupies the concept, which is, naturally, animality, here in the form of the swan. In the context of the myth as whole the signification becomes clear—bodily desire is animal (which corresponds with the signification of Plato's chariot analogy). Yet there is another level of signification here. This system involves Zeus-as-swan and Leda in sexual intercourse. The sexual act itself is the signifier, signifying heterosexuality—not bestiality, because we recognize that animality is merely a sign for masculine (bodily) desire for the female body. The signification reveals itself—heterosexuality is being equated with bestiality. Sexual lust for a woman's body is an animal desire; consummation of the act is to *become-animal*. Now it becomes very clear why Zeus could never have intercourse with a mortal woman *in his divine (masculine) form*. We must notice as well that in Rubens' painting the swan and Leda are engaged in intercrural intercourse—the mode of intercourse, as Keller notes, that was reserved for equals in Ancient Greece.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the painting reveals a further signification—animals and women are equals, and therefore are equally subject to masculine domination. We could decipher further significations (for they are so rich in Rubens) but this must suffice for our purposes here.

One could object here that the average observer, or reader, does not see or read these significations, and hence, all we have arrived at is a meaningless over-philosophical analysis that corresponds in no way to the world as experienced by most people. This is certainly a legitimate criticism, and one that on some level contains a bit of truth. To examine this problematic—that is, what Barthes has termed the “reader of myth”—and to extract the political function of these significations, we must return to the double function of animyth.

Animyth, again as semiological system, “points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us.”<sup>20</sup> Yet, animyth is experienced in a very different way by the reader of myth as opposed to the decipherer of myth. For the reader, animyth “is experienced as innocent speech:

not because its intentions are hidden—if they were hidden, they could not be efficacious—but because they are naturalized. In fact, what allows the reader to consume myth innocently is that he does not see it as a semiological system but as an inductive one. Where there is only an equivalence, he sees a kind of causal process: the signifier and the signified have, in his eyes, a natural relationship. This confusion can be expressed otherwise: any semiological system is a system of values; now the myth-consumer takes the signification for a system of facts: myth is read as a factual system, whereas it is but a semiological system.<sup>21</sup>

In animyth what is being naturalized is at once animal life and the signifier that fills it (be it women, other races, other nationalities, social classes, etc.) as *other*, and hence their domination is justified through being naturalized. For through the concept of animality the entirety of the non-human animal world is reduced to one fundamental meaning—

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<sup>19</sup> Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 25.

<sup>20</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 117.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 131.

*not human*.<sup>22</sup> They are not complex biological organisms with their own desires and interests.<sup>23</sup> They have no intrinsic value, no dignity; they are not human by virtue of being the very manifestation of *déraison*. Through the appropriation of animality into the existing dominant codes functioning in society, the oppressed groups in society, here specifically women, are naturalized as *less than human*.<sup>24</sup> Their exploitation is thus justified and perpetuated; meanwhile, the position of non-human animals as wholly other, as *déraison*, is reinforced and their exploitation is thus also justified and perpetuated.

### *Conclusion: Ecofeminism and the Hope of Liberation*

The ecofeminist critic Andree Collard has suggested “no woman will be free until all animals are free and nature is released from man’s ruthless exploitation.”<sup>25</sup> Evelyn Fox Keller has established the phallogentricity of the discourse which has come to shape modern scientific theory and practice. I have attempted to establish the anthropocentrism of this same discourse, and moreover, the close conjunction of the constructs of animality and femininity. I have also hoped to establish the specific use of animality as politico-epistemological tool within this discourse. The use of this tool I have postulated primarily as a semiological system, which I have termed animythology. In the struggle to delocalize the power concentrated in binary systems—here primarily, those of gender and species—we must recognize the tools and techniques employed and attempt to appropriate them. In this regard, the use of animality as politico-epistemological tool in power-knowledge relations lends support to Collard’s claim that women’s liberation necessitates animal liberation. She appeals to the feminist movement at large: “Women especially must do some serious thinking and reconnect, if not to our gynocentric roots, at the very least to the history of man’s violence to animals.

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<sup>22</sup> Taking into consideration of course the distinction between domesticated and feral animals—for domestication is excluded from the concept of animality. Animality always relates to the Dionysian and ferality. Domestication is the realm par excellence of the Apollonian.

<sup>23</sup> Indeed, it seems that we—both the scientific community and society at large—have very little desire to learn about them as such. Our interest is almost entirely utilitarian—we cut open the skulls of primates to study the biological basis of violence, we try to save the rainforest to find a cure for cancer (which, ironically, seems to be caused by the very same lifestyle and environmental choices which are destroying the rainforest), we enlist as wildlife conservationists to preserve the animals so we can hunt and kill them for sport, etc. Cf. Andrée Collard with Joyce Contrucci, *Rape of the Wild: Man’s Violence against Animals and the Earth*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), especially chapter three “Animal experimentation”.

<sup>24</sup> Foucault has examined this in some detail in relation to madness. “Madness borrowed its face from the mask of the beast. Those chained to the cell walls were no longer men whose minds had wandered, but beasts preyed upon by a natural frenzy: as if madness at its extreme point, freed from that moral unreason in which its most attenuated forms are enclosed, managed to rejoin, by a paroxysm of strength, the immediate violence of animality.” From *Madness and Civilization*, quoted in *Animal Philosophy: Ethics and Identity*, edited by Peter Atterton and Matthew Calarco, (New York: Continuum, 2004), 68.

<sup>25</sup> *Rape of the Wild: Man’s Violence against Animals and the Earth*, with Joyce Contrucci, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 1.

For what has been done to animals has always preceded what has been done to us.”<sup>26</sup>  
The women’s movement appropriated femininity as a source of empowerment; the  
ecofeminist movement calls for the appropriation of animality.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 98.

# The Persistent Corpse

## At the Intersection of Creation and Destruction

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on the figure of the persistent corpse in T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" and the larger context of World War I. I begin with an examination of capitalism vis-à-vis Marx in relation to the figures that inhabit "The Waste Land." From here I move to explore how this commodification produces the individuals as mechanized subjects within the matrix of modernism and capitalism. The cyclic modes of capitalist production in the poem prove fruitless, yet the organic production found in the corpse is generative. Thus the bodies of the dead become sites of alternative modes of production. For this analysis, I engage Kristeva's writing on the corpse as abject. Yet even the body becomes a space where the mechanic and the organic overlap. From here I move into a discussion of the individual soldier in WWI. He is commodified as a good through the machination of war, and then is abjected from the state in order to protect the state from the threatening Other. He becomes a frontier or liminal figure, abjected yet held in relation to the Subject and the Object. Importantly the figure of the persistent corpse crops up again in the no-man's land of trench warfare. Here the literal bodies of the dead become sites where regrowth occurs in the spring. Thus we can see the soldier as an ambiguous figure. In one way he represents destruction in its purest form, yet he additionally seems to embody production. Perhaps the best way to describe this is in terms of a process of purification. War, and its individual operators (soldiers) is first and foremost destructive, yet it acts as an agent of change and even creativity. The collapse of binaries is focused on the soldier, who becomes a figure that ushers in a new paradigm.

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The ontology of the corpse within the matrix of modernism presents a challenging and multi-valenced figure for analysis. The corpse seems to personify the modern age—or at least modernist critiques of it. Yet it is that which must be rejected and pushed away. It is the radical embodiment of the "abject," to borrow Julia Kristeva's term. It ambiguously signifies both the human and non-human, and thus acts as a site of meaning confluence for many binarisms. The corpse functions on a literal and symbolic level in many modernist texts, but also has a radically inescapable physical existence in the context of WWI. But before we examine directly the figure of the corpse itself, it is

necessary to disclose the ways in which modernity commodifies and mechanizes individual bodies, both living and dead.

1.

T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" establishes a rhetoric of economics based in a social/cultural/political event which functions as metonymic of the modern zeitgeist. Eliot's examination of WWI and London's financial district also touches upon this point. Descriptions of the businessmen who work in the City use the language of death and depersonalization to produce the effect of commodification. When they are shown traveling to work "Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled, /And each man fixed his eyes before his feet" (Eliot lines 64-65). In this description we are given humans as commodified goods, as discrete units of production without personality or individuality. The reader cannot separate the men from one another, and cannot even separate the crowd into individuals as they "Flowed up the hill and down King William Street" like an undifferentiated body of water (Eliot l. 66). The narrator "saw one [he] knew, and stopped him, crying: 'Stetson!'" (Eliot l. 69). It seems in this case that Eliot differentiates the crowd, but it is important to note that this section of the poem ends with the narrator unanswered. The reader must ask herself if Stetson heard the narrator at all, or if Stetson, as a commodified cog in the corporate structure, is even capable of individuating himself from the crowd at the call of his name.

One aspect of modernity and its commodification of the individual that Eliot stresses is an increasing sense of mechanization. The image of the men walking to work invokes the feeling of rote repetition. Similarly, the narrative tone leads us to think that the actions of each day are completely undifferentiable from those of another, completely and perfectly repeated.

This repetition reveals the subjects in their devalued state as pure units of productivity. They function metaphorically as cogs in machinery, and are valued only insofar as they perform a specific function. Indeed, the circular, revolving nature of capital and business is a recurrent theme throughout "The Waste Land." The clairvoyante Madame Sosostris, after warning the narrator to "Fear death by water," says "I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring" (Eliot ll. 55-56). This ominous stanza occurs in close proximity to the description of the businessmen in the City, thus forming a connection between the economic structure of capitalism and the crowd walking in a circle. The image here is cyclic and unproductive. As the businessmen move around the same circle continuously, they end up doing a lot of work—a lot of walking—but ultimately have produced little, and are in the same place they began and have been many times since.

Another image of this seeming futility is the typist who appears in lines 222-56. As a typist she embodies the ideal of mechanical (re)production. Her work is the mere depression of keys, and all meaning in the text she is copying is absent, existing only on either side of her in the creator and consumer. She is the conduit for meaning, and perpetuates the symbolic system of language without partaking of it. She generates the cycle without generating anything *out* of the cycle. At the end of her portion she "smoothes her hair with automatic hand, /And puts a record on the gramophone" (Eliot l. 255-56). Her work certainly involves automatic use of her hands, but the capitalist valuation of her as a re-productive machine has here carried into her private life, and

she resembles a machine even in her non-public compartment. Additionally, the parallel between her “automatic hand” and the automatic arm of the record player is inescapable. The record revolves in a circle, yet produces nothing that lasts beyond the very moment of production. It gives the illusion of generativity, yet is the very definition of ephemeral. Just like the typist, the record player is a symbol for pure re-production, a mechanical conduit for meaning (created by composer, consumed by listener) that is excluded from the symbolic system it perpetuates.

Mechanized ontologies permeate “The Waste Land.” For Eliot, “the human engine waits/Like a taxi throbbing waiting” (Eliot l. 216-17). Eliot argues that modern society has turned man into a machine which is constantly “throbbing between two lives” (Eliot l. 218). When the text is read through a Marxist lens, the lives become capitalist and non-capitalist, though Eliot might call them capitalist and human—or even dead and living, in light of the poem’s obsession with mechanization and death-in-life.

## 2.

Ultimately, the poem puts forth an alternate model of cyclical production. In absolute contrast with the typist and the businessmen, there is a mode of production at play here signaled by a *generative* cycle. Eliot claims that “blind or timid adherence” to the past “should positively be discouraged,” holding that “novelty is better than repetition” when the repetition is merely mechanical (Eliot “Tradition” 367). The novel repetition in “The Waste Land” is signaled initially, and not unambiguously, by the opening line invoking April, and by association the pastoral opening of *The Canterbury Tales*. April is presented as cruel, yet the depiction is hardly the neutral, deadened image given for the businessmen. On the contrary, April is described with three active verbs—gerunds—in the first three lines. As a symbol for spring—the renewal of the cycle of seasons—April is shown “breeding/Lilacs out of the dead land” (Eliot l. 2). The process here is obviously cyclic, yet is generative (and regenerative) for the “dead land” which recalls the lifeless no-man’s-land of WWI. It is a cycle that is nonetheless a movement forward and a healing for something devastated by modernity. Even the act of “mixing/Memory and desire” is a type of progress that contrasts with the complete lack of reflection on past, present, or future that characterized the typist and the businessmen (Eliot l. 2-3). The presence of flowers in the poem (specifically the hyacinths in lines 35-42) signals the rebirth of spring, yet they are tainted by allusion to the madness and death (by water) of Ophelia, which gets referenced more directly throughout the poem.

The cycles within the text are reinforced and reflected in the structure of the poem itself, which is fashioned as a type of circle or arc. The poem opens with the allusion to *The Canterbury Tales*, one of the earliest and foundational texts in the English language. Indeed, the first seven lines of the poem utilize purely natural imagery and evoke a sense of the ancient or pre-human. We start at a ground-zero for human development. The poem, however, then rapidly progresses in time with a reference to the Starnbergersee (l. 8). The reader is brought from the ancient to the modern in the move of one line. Through a linguistic and historical lens, the majority of the poem takes place in the modern era, or Eliot’s “present.” The end of section five returns the reader to an ancient discourse, citing the Upanishads, and closes the poem with the mantra “Shantih shantih shantih” (l. 433). Is the trajectory of the poem then a

type of circle or cycle? Certainly we have not ended where we started, with *The Canterbury Tales*—yet we have drawn back temporally from modern discourse. Eliot returns the reader to a chronologically pre-modern language, yet the reader feels that some forward progress has been made throughout the course of the poem. The ending, then, must be considered a move into the non-modern (though I hesitate to apply the term “post-modern”). The introduction of ancient Hindu terms is the progression of the text into a discourse that rejects and abandons modernity and its mechanizing effects on people. It abandons modernity thoroughly through the abandonment of the culture in which modernity arose—namely the West. The final rumination upon “shantih” is not a mere return to and repetition of ancient culture, but rather the utilization of history in order to move beyond present conditions. It is at once a return to the beginning and a progression forward from the present. Indeed, it creates a cycle that simultaneously returns to its initial position and yet generates new meaning.

On an intra-textual level, the Phoenician Sailor becomes an important symbol of this paradoxically non-repetitive or generative cycle. As Phlebas dies, he enters “the whirlpool” (Eliot l. 318). This is a challenging image—at first glance it appears to be another instance of pure and mechanically cyclic repetition, forever spinning. However, the whirlpool, through its circular repetitions, brings the subject gradually closer to the center where the body disappears under the waves and the Self crosses the border from life into death. And it is precisely at the center of this spiral that we come upon Phlebas’ submerged body as signifier, produced as such through Eliot’s language.

In discussing Phlebas, Madame Sosostriis draws the narrator’s attention to the “pearls that were his eyes” (Eliot l. 48). This line alludes to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* where it is meant as a type of comfort for the loss of a father. In “The Waste Land” the meaning seems to be related. Although death is inevitable (and occasionally untimely) and the cycle of life and death indeed circular, Life does not continue in utter unproductive or meaningless repetition. Rather, the dead sailor becomes a surface upon which new growth is continually palimpsested. Unlike the typist, he accretes meaning (here symbolically as layers on the pearls) with each repetition of the cycle. Thus, while the cycle can be said to repeat in one sense, it seems linearly or productively oriented, and inclines itself towards a non-repetitive model. There is an inescapable overtone of irony to this image, however, in the fact that pearls are common symbols for economic wealth. In a similar vein, Eliot reminds us that for the artist the creation of art is “a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality” (Eliot “Tradition” 369). The production which the dead Phlebas embodies requires the sacrifice of his self, the extinction of his personality. However, in this process of development and sacrifice “change is a development which abandons nothing *en route*,” just as, in a literal sense, the body of Phlebas remains a surface upon which the production takes place (Eliot “Tradition” 368).

The trope about pearls recurs in line 122. The narrator is then asked ““Are you alive, or not?”” (Eliot l. 123). This is the fundamental question which poses a challenge in analyzing the figure of the Phoenician Sailor. As a persistent corpse, the Phoenician Sailor occupies a liminal space between life and death which Eliot uses as a point of entry for modernist critique. Add to this the image of “That corpse you planted last year

in your garden,” and Eliot appears to be employing the grotesque image of the (textually and literally) persistent corpse with great strength (Eliot l. 71). Both corpses here are productive of a certain type of life (through flowers and pearls) and it becomes difficult to distinguish whether they are “alive, or not.” There is here a fundamental difference between the invocations of the corpse in the “dead sound on the final stroke of nine” accompanying the living dead businessmen and the realities of the corpse in the whirlpool and garden bed (Eliot l. 68). The former signifies death, the latter embody it. Julia Kristeva writes in *Powers of Horror*, “in the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept” (Kristeva 3). The flat encephalograph indicates the presence of death, but it is not death itself; it is merely a conduit or stand-in for what it represents. The deathly descriptions of the businessmen and the typist invoke and signify death—the death is present only symbolically, and the symbolic language of the poem is the conduit and stand-in, the mediation, separating the consumer (reader) from the immediacy of the event. The corpse presented as direct image in the whirlpool and garden, however, “[does] not *signify* death,” it inescapably embodies it (Kristeva, 3). Although the poem is using symbolic language here, it is important to note that the businessmen and typist stand for death, whereas the corpse-as-death stands for modernity. In the former, death is being represented symbolically through a mediating image. In the latter death is being represented *as a symbol*, and there is no mediation between corpse and the experience of the corpse.

In discussing the border between Self and Other, between life and death, Kristeva says the following: “If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything” (Kristeva 3). The persistent corpse is the expansion of the liminal space into pre-established categories of Self and Other. It is an object abjected outside the symbolic system—it is a “thing that no longer matches and therefore no longer signifies anything” (Kristeva 4). Yet Eliot’s poetry imbues it with a great deal of significance (in a way that Kristeva claims the direct experience (versus literary depiction) of the corpse cannot due to the overwhelming horror and revulsion present in that which “no longer signifies”), and he seems to be saying that abjection of the symbolic corpse is grounds for rejuvenation within the very object of the abject—the corpse itself. Thus, “one does not get rid of the impure; one can, however, bring it into being a second time, and differently from the original impurity. It is a repetition” (Kristeva 28). The persistent corpses of Phlebas and the unnamed person buried in the garden are both able to accrete symbolic significance through the passage of cycles over time. Both are sites of absolute abjection for Kristeva, but become the main sites of regeneration and reproduction for Eliot. In this way, Eliot is able to conflate death and life, rejection and consumption, in a symbol that refuses to adhere to a commodified valuation of life (a symbol that is in fact the very *denial* of the ability to reduce to economic terms).

Importantly this is done through an exclusively organic symbolic system. Although the input into the system is human (as a modern, mechanized construct), the corpse exists as mere physical embodiment, the organic in its most pure and literal sense. The outputs here (pearls and flowers) are both not only organic, but also classic symbols of beauty in nature. As symbols of beauty they have been invested with desire



and thus economic value. In short, they have become commodified. Despite appearing to be in favor of organic production over capitalist production, Eliot refuses to allow the reader to establish functional dichotomies, and is constantly shifting the grounds of understanding. In Kristeva the conflation of binarism in a situation like this defines the “horror” used in the title. The encroachment of the corpse on everything is the ultimate in the profane, the horrible, the abject. Yet she realizes that the corpse, in being “jetted, abjected, into ‘my’ world” through a persistent presence, constitutes a third-party challenge to the Self/Other distinction, and creates a dissolution of that border (Kristeva 4). The Self then “finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than abject” (Kristeva 5). This leads the subject to “abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*.” (Kristeva 3). The corpse, and its forceful erasure of dichotomies, is then that which allows us to constitute identity, and is in this sense a creative symbol for Kristeva as well as Eliot.

As we have seen, Eliot uses this language of death-in-life to describe the businessmen of the City. How is this different than the life-in-death of the blooming corpse? To begin, the capitalist mode of production is artificial, and creates “uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions” (Marx, Engels 7). Consumption of, and production through, the corpse is a highly organic, naturally-occurring process. Additionally, the product differs greatly. Throughout “The Waste Land” we are given almost no direct references to what capitalist production actually produces. There is a devaluation of economic wealth in the text. However, the natural products of the corpses’ non-capitalist production are recurrent throughout the poem. The key distinction here is that of organics.

Additionally, the language of death is applied to the living (commodified) subjects who form the City. As Kristeva states, death encroaches upon life, the border is transcended, and distinctions blur. However, the depiction of Phlebas and the corpse in the garden applies the language of *life* to *dead* subjects. Here life seems to be encroaching upon death. It reclaims, through a consumptive action, the natural refuse of its own processes. Yet rather than erasing or completely consuming the abject, Eliot’s production-through-the-corpse places the abject in relation to subject and object. It reinscribes the abject within the symbolic system. Yet abject corpse becomes neither completely Other/object (as it is a necessary surface for (re)generation) nor completely Self/subject (as it is not entirely consumed in production). It becomes a third party that challenges the dichotomy by maintaining itself in relation to Subject/Object, yet refusing to be subsumed in either.

My analysis thus far has relied heavily on the language of mechanics and organics, and has placed them in a dichotomous relationship. Yet perhaps this opposition is fallacious and in fact is deconstructed by the text itself. The typist and the businessmen are important symbols for the mechanical, and we have seen the way in which they operate. It is crucial to remember that, though they function as machines, each person is still human, and leads an embodied existence. Conversely, the corpse-body is the formerly human which has become dehumanized and reduced to a collection of mere biological processes which, void of a human consciousness, tend toward a mechanically perpetuative system—a machine, in a sense, that has lost its operator, and thus has lost that which signified it as more than mechanical. The body

(as organic machine and mechanic organ) then becomes itself the site of collapse for the organic/mechanic distinction.

### 3.

It is vital to read Eliot's work in a post-World War I context. Trench warfare and its iconic "no-man's land" leave an indelible mark on "The Waste Land," as is indicated as early in the poem as the title. The effect of WWI on the conscious of Europe was profound, and the war served at that time as a marker of the ultimate modern. It was supposed to be "the War to end all wars," and involved the very latest technology, such as machine guns and tanks. These supremely modern advances created a conflict that was uniquely modern, and was conducted on a scale for which society was not yet prepared. As a result, the popular imagination suffered: "reality, a sense of proportion, and reason—these were the major casualties of the war" (Eksteins 236). And at the center of this war, to a greater extent than ever before, was situated the figure of the soldier.

To begin with, the individual soldier is uniquely situated within the political structure. As an individual human, he maintains, in part, his own subjective autonomy. However, through the draft and the multi-valenced martial structure, he becomes produced as a tool, commodified as a literal "unit," or number on a page. He is forced to subjugate his will to the greater structure of the nation, and these "actual relations of subjugation manufacture subjects" (Foucault 45). Commodified as a mobile unit, the soldier is reduced to a firearm operator, and becomes as mechanized as the weapon he holds.

The soldier sits at the nexus between his homeland and the enemy. He is the focal point for the conflict, and the site upon which factions converge. In the process of war, the State perceives (as any entity must perceive) itself as Subject (Self) and the enemy state as Object (Other). The Other then poses a threat to the integrity of the Self and must be ejected to maintain identity (this is symbolically applicable to all conflict, but gains literal resonance with tactics of invasion). In regards to this, Kristeva claims that "it is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order" (4). The border (here the trench) delimits the identity, system, and order of the State, and thus (from the point of view of the State) must not be violated. Although a nation (the speaking State) may be the one invading another rather than facing the threat of invasion itself, political motivations must be separated out from lived experience. The condition on the front, thrown acutely into focus by the use of trench warfare, is that the speaking "I" of the individual soldier is always operating from a position of defense, constantly under threat of invasion, continually fending off assaults on his integrity. It is the soldier who is deployed into this position, and who must adopt the task of constantly ejecting the Other.

Thus the soldier acts as a frontier figure. The soldier "was a traveler who had journeyed, on order, to the limits of existence, and there on the periphery he 'lived' in a unique way, on the edge of no man's land, on the margin of normal categories" (Eksteins 211). Topologically, he is situated at the edges of the State and is stationed there to defend against breaches of the State's periphery, no matter where the State chooses to move the boundary line. Foucault describes the literal topography of conflict:

Increasingly, wars, the practices of war, and the institutions of war tended to exist, so to speak, only on the frontiers, on the outer limits of the great State units, and only as a violent relationship—that actually existed or threatened to exist—between States. (48)

The soldier is a liminal figure who operates at the volatile border between states. The space of no man's land illustrates this vividly. Here is a literal liminal space between two nations, an aporia between bounded perimeters of each State. It is a space in which even the liminal figure of the soldier cannot exist for very long before voiding of meaning himself (through passing into death). Yet it is on this ground that the conflict must play out, and here, significantly, that the dead accrue. The dead, as corpse and abject, is that which "no longer signifies anything," which has voided of meaning (Kristeva 4). Thus it is fitting that this figure should be the only permanent inhabitant of the unsignifying space of no man's land.

The corpse-occupant of no man's land is strongly invoked in "The Waste Land," and is shown intimately tied in with the land. For Eliot, the no man's land is a "stony rubbish" where the only knowable things were "A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,/And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,/And the dry stone no sound of water"—a place from which "The nymphs are departed" (Eliot l. 20, 22-24, 175). Section five "What the Thunder Said" continues to describe the waste land of the no man's land. And palimpsested upon this desolate landscape are the dead bodies of the soldiers and their attendant decay. Eksteins quotes the eyewitness testament of a Charles Delvert: "War is so beautiful in books but in reality it stinks of shit and rotting flesh" (Eksteins, 226). These two items, lumped together as refuse, are exactly Kristeva's literal definition of the abject. Yet we see that a certain type of growth proceeds even in this seemingly irredeemable cesspool. Spring on the front is capable of "breeding/Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing/Memory and desire, stirring/Dull roots with spring rain" (l. 1-4). The presence of new growth—organic production—allows the no man's land to be resignified and reclaims it from the sole possession of the abject. It is important to note that what re-imbues the no man's land is an organic production, which is working against the mechanized state structures that, through their production of war, generated the aporia of no man's land.

The soldier-corpse is ontologically analogous to the figure of Phlebas previously discussed. The concept of a persistent corpse becomes inescapably physically embodied by the corpse inhabitant of no man's land. The soldier dies in a charge against the other trench, and is left in the interstitial space, there being no other individual willing to risk death to retrieve the corpse. So the body persists exactly where it ceased to signify as an individual and was created as abject corpse. As the stalemated and entrenched battles continued without spatial progress in either direction, the no man's land began to accrete persistent bodies. Brigadier P. Mortimer recounts that the stench arising from these corpses escalated to a point where the living would journey out of the trench to remove the enemy from the vicinity, often getting killed themselves in the process. Ekstein comments on this: "How long would it be before men sensed the horrible ironies of a world in which gallantry was called upon to fight corpses, in which the living died trying to destroy the already dead?" (220). Historically

the dead soldier was inescapably and grotesquely persistent, forcing a literal physical address.

As with Phlebas, the dead body of the soldier literally becomes a surface upon which new growth accretes in a move that at once regenerates the body and acknowledges its continued existence as the ultimate waste product. In "The Waste Land" the narrator says, "I was neither/Living or dead, and I knew nothing" (Eliot l. 38-39). Just as Phlebas is dead as an individual yet alive through the layering of pearl, so the abandoned corpse of the soldier is dead, yet regains life through the regenerative cycle of decay and sprouting occasioned by spring. Additionally, and perhaps it is unnecessary to point out, a corpse—unsignifying and void of the meaning-generating human aspect—is incapable of knowing anything, as the narrator says. Perhaps an even more apt figure of comparison is the corpse buried in Stetson's garden. The regeneration present in this figure, as with the soldier, is one of literal diffusion into the ground and a botanical sprouting arising from the earth-corpse.

This ambiguity represents a confluence of opposites: the creative and the destructive. As corpses, Phlebas and the man buried in the garden signify destruction. Their non-living ontology points to a violence done to their person, intentional or otherwise. They represent destruction by embodying the essence of the destroyed. Yet they simultaneously embody creation by become the material out of which new objects arise. In fact, it is the very fact of their death that enables them to become agents of creation. The operation of the soldier's corpse is similar. What alters the symbolic functioning is that not only does the dead soldier radically embody destruction and thus inescapably signify it, he represents, in his commodified functioning as an agent, unit, or conveyor of death, the destructive force itself. The difference here is that whereas both Phlebas' corpse and the dead soldier indicate the presence of a destructive force by embodying the work or consequences of that force, the soldier additionally directly signals the presence of the destructive force by embodying both it and its consequences. Thus the soldier is an even more radical embodiment of the confluence of creation and destruction. He is "an agent of both destruction and regeneration, of death and rebirth" and thus stands for a "world [that] was in the throes of destruction, which now seemed irreversible, but was also in the process of renewal" (Eksteins 211). In this operation of the soldier-corpse there are hints at a purification of a world that would cause an event like WWI to occur. The modern era seems to have brought on its own violent suicide, and a new, renewed world would arise from it; the figure of the soldier would be the vanguard of this change, the embodiment of the bridge between the two states.

Even beyond the signifying corpse, "the soldier represented a creative force" through his actions in life (Eksteins 211). The individual made possible the war in general (and the war on such an unprecedented scale), and it was the "the war, despite its destruction or, indeed, owing to its pervasive horror, [which] had become an evocative force, a stimulus...to personal imagination...to a new and vital realm of activity" (Eksteins 215). As an agent of destruction, the soldier enables the war, which, through its sheer excess, produces a backflow into creativity.

Throughout "The Waste Land" we can see the radical collapse of binary oppositions, leaving a profound effect on the text. Kristeva gestures at this with the

invocation of the corpse as disrupter of the Self/Other opposition. Marx even calls for an overturning of the capitalist system and the creation of a post-Bourgeois/Proletariat society. In dialogue with each other, there arises a deep dissatisfaction with the modern paradigm and a sense of the necessity for reformation. We find that, paradoxically, it is the figure of the individual soldier, arguably the ultimate embodiment of the modern paradigm, which through destruction ushers in the creation of a new paradigm.

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# How Can Brandom Get Through To Fodor?

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**Astract:** There have been several exchanges in the journal of *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* between Robert Brandom and Jerry Fodor on the subject of concepts. Robert Brandom takes a strong inferentialist stance on concepts while Fodor takes the strongly opposed position of “informational atomism”. It seems through a review of their exchanges that no advancement toward reconciliation can be bought by either writer . This paper takes up this challenge of reconciliation, by reviewing the elements of their discussion, and uncovering a possible point of contact between their theories. With the adoption of a weak inferentialist position a two-fold conception of concepts can enter the discussion, wherein informational atomism can achieve the sort of primitive meaning that Fodor is interested in while inferentialist semantics maintains its own, but different position that expresses the normative, distinctly social meaning that Brandom is after. Both Brandom and Fodor have had significant success in their respective academic circles, however “cross-discipline” success is more rare. This paper proposes a point of contact that may open up further productive discussion between these two authors.

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Much in the same spirit that John Donne once wrote, “no man is an island”, Robert Brandom would have us believe that “no concept is an island”, and Jerry Fodor would be the first in line to disagree. In Fodor’s book *Concepts*, he puts forth an atomistic, representational theory of meaning and finds any inferential role semantics to be largely problematic. Brandom has called Fodor’s work “an exciting and invigorating sort of project” (Brandom, 588 b) and has made repeated attempts to broaden Fodor’s horizons to his own world of inferential semantics without much success. The purpose of this investigation is to consider one way in which Brandom’s thesis in which concepts are constituted by inferences and bound up in normativity may be re-constructed in order to make some engagement with Fodor’s work possible. It will be assumed here that the reader finds Fodor’s project as worthy of consideration as Brandom has stated that it is (since it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully motivate any of Fodor’s relevant premises or methodological commitments). Initially, both Brandom’s and Fodor’s essential positions will be briefly reviewed. This will be followed by a look at some of

the specific points of contention between them. At this point our investigation will then move to distinguish between a strong and weak construal of the inferentialist thesis. It will be shown that a Sellarsian weak construal is compatible with Fodor's work in a way that neither Brandom's weak nor strong construals are, while the normative aspect of the thesis is suitably preserved (that seems to be Brandom's chief concern). From this examination it will be made clear that if Brandom is serious about engaging Fodor's naturalist semantic project, he should adopt Sellars' weak inferential position and that he can do so at a reasonable cost to the normativity at the core of his thesis.

It is no secret that Jerry Fodor stands diametrically opposed to Robert Brandom on matters of concepts and semantics. Fodor has taken an increasingly hard-line stance against inferential role semantics (IRS) over the past twenty years to the point where he only feels safe adopting what he calls Informational Atomism (IA). IA is a combination of informational semantics and lexical atomism. In informational semantics, "content is constituted by some sort of nomic, mind-world relation", so "having a concept (concept possession) is constituted, at least in part, by *being in* some sort of nomic, mind-world relation." (Fodor, 121) As far as concepts go, lexical atomism means that "most lexical concepts have no internal structure" (Ibid.). So Fodor's story looks something like this: our brains "lock" to properties of things in the world in some law-like way, and it is the atomistic concepts resulting that "have the 'underived' intentionality from which the contents of propositional attitudes and the formulas of public languages are supposed to be inherited." (Fodor and Lepore, 466). While this story may seem a bit short, it appears Fodor has adopted it mostly because it is the only unproblematic option for conceptualizing the mind. IRS is out of the question (for reasons we will address later), and most mental representationalists (MRs) are in trouble. When MRs think of learning a primitive concept as an inductive process, which "requires devising and testing hypotheses about what the property is in virtue of which things fall under the concept" (Fodor, 123), they run into real problems. Fodor states:

on pain of circularity, the (absolutely) primitive concepts can't themselves be learned this way. Suppose the concept RED is primitive. Then to learn RED inductively you'd have to devise and confirm the hypothesis that things fall under RED *in virtue of being red*. But you couldn't devise or confirm that hypothesis unless you already had the concept RED, *since the concept RED is invoked in the formulation of the hypothesis* (124).

This goes for every other primitive concept as well. A few fancy steps later, (see Fodor, *Chapter 6*) we have Fodor's non-cognitive "nomic mind-world relation" concept acquisition, with a handful of exciting implications. However, neither these steps nor their implications are really pertinent for the present discussion. The key point here is that Fodor is an informational atomist (*seemingly because*) he is highly suspicious of IRS and any induction-based learning of primitives.

Robert Brandom's focus is very different from Fodor's, first of all due to his pragmatic methodological approach to concepts. Brandom conceptualizes pragmatism as intrinsically linked to semantics, such that "what attributions of semantic contentfulness are for is explaining the normative significance of intentional states such as beliefs and of speech acts such as assertions. Thus the criteria of adequacy to which semantic theory's concept of content must answer are to be set by the pragmatic theory" (Brandom 1998, 143). With this essential approach motivating his work,

Brandom develops his “strong inferentialism” in two steps.

Brandom’s theory revolves around the explanatory power of inferential role semantics. In the first step he states that the only way that conceptual content can be generated is in inferential chains. This means that when we reason, conceptual content is playing “an inferential role as premise and conclusion of inferences” (Brandom 2000, 57). Brandom finds the use of concepts in inferential chains to be ubiquitous, since we cannot speak nor even *think* without them. Brandom asks,

What [...] makes the difference between mere responsive classification and responsive *conceptual* classification? The insight underlying conceptual role semantics is that in virtue of the role it plays in the observer’s behavioral economy, the observer *understands* its response, in a way the parrot and the photocell do not. The observer’s practical grasp of the concept “red” [...] consists in her dispositions to take the application of the concept *red* as a *reason* that warrants the application of other concepts. [...] In short specifically *conceptual* classification is distinguished by its *inferential* articulation (Brandom 1993,662).

It follows that having a stronger *understanding* of a concept would require the “mastery of at least some of its inferential relations to other concepts” (Brandom 2000, 49). This leads us to Brandom’s second step, in which he enters the notion of normativity. For Brandom, the social game that follows concept use as entirely inferentially articulated is one of “making claims and giving and asking for reasons” (48). The use of concepts in inferential chains is essentially a normative affair; when an agent uses a concept, she is making commitments, and required to justify the entitlements to the kinds of inferences that the concept consists in. As above, these commitments are implicit in all thinking and speaking. Brandom notes, “intending [...] includes committing oneself, undertaking a responsibility concerning how things will be” and that “beliefs are [...] also] things appropriately assessed as to their correctness in the sense of their truth” (Brandom 2001, 590). Speech acts are the same way, insofar as “claiming and commanding essentially involve adopting normative statuses, including as they do the undertaking of responsibility [...] and the assertion of authority” (Ibid). The central point that follows from these two steps is that inferentially articulated concept use (which is essentially *all* concept use) is always a normative affair. In short, normativity is bound up in the inferential articulation of concepts. With this brief characterization of the Brandom’s thesis, we can then move to his work’s engagement with Fodor.

Before we move to a view of how Brandom should modify his thesis in order to engage Fodor, it will be helpful to identify the specific points of contention that each author has raised. We will initially see one of two direct objections Fodor has raised against Brandom, in which he primarily focuses on the faulty mechanics of an inferentialist position. Following this, we will see how Brandom urges Fodor to accept his methodology, from which his normativity nearly immediately follows. These issues will offer us a point of departure for moving towards reconciliation.

Fodor raises two key issues with Brandom. He finds that which inferences are supposed to be meaning-constitutive is unclear in Brandom’s theory and that it is incompatible with the necessity for meaning to be compositional. Due to limited space, we will only address the former concern here. Fodor thinks of conceptual role inferences as constituted by an *analytic* class of inferences, since neither the identity of



an inferential role as a necessary condition for content nor looking to the purely logical form inferences as determining content can powerfully distinguish enough between different types of content (Fodor and Lepore, 469). Fodor sees this sole alternative as a real problem for Brandom, since as Fodor reads Kant and Frege, “analyticity is supposed to be *truth in virtue of meaning*” (Ibid). This reading also helps explain Fodor’s atomism: if a semantic primitive has an atomic meaning, one need not run in circles in order to explain truth. Furthermore, Fodor being the philosopher-cognitive scientist he is thinks that any conceptualization about the truth of statements really needs to be more dependent on the world (an aspect Brandom has little to say about) and less on the human social-interaction within it. Fodor states:

It may be a matter of linguistic rule, or social convention, or whatever that determines whether dogs have to be animals [... but] whether thunder reliably follows lightning has *nothing to do* with which inferences I, or my society, or even the experts I defer to, take to be [...] ‘appropriate’. Thunder follows lightning [...] because of the laws of meteorology. (Fodor and Lepore, 470)

It is quite obvious here that Fodor has a greater faith in the ability of science (and the kinds of philosophy that tag along behind) to penetrate all things (including language), than Brandom does. This issue is merely a case of *naturalistic* semantics (Cartesian in Fodor’s words) at odds with *pragmatic* semantics. It is exactly on this methodological issue that Brandom responds to Fodor.

In his paper, “Modality, Normativity, and Intentionality”, Brandom uses the history of philosophy to demonstrate how Fodor has already made the same methodological commitments that he has. Brandom reminds Fodor that, “The project of naturalizing the mind and cognition has a long philosophical history. But it is possible to see these projects as episodes in a still broader movement of thought, in which naturalism is only one strand- indeed, an optional one” (Brandom 2001, 588). I will not sketch much more than Brandom’s conclusion here, since his argument runs quite long. Essentially, Brandom draws a parallel between the modal and nonmodal descriptions and normative language and nonnormative language in order to establish that both of the latter terms in the pairs presuppose (or require the inferences contained in) the former parts (602). The result is that the historically, the philosophical decision to partake in using modal descriptions for the formulation of laws and theories (since it was not always the case in the science) follows the same methodological commitment involved in the use of normative language. Brandom knows that the contemporary sciences now “routinely employ modally rich counterfactual-supporting idioms” (601) and so Fodor ought to accept the normative inferences of concept use by the same token that he accepts the modal inferences employed in the regular course of scientific methodology that he refers to. With Brandom’s chief concern stated here, it then makes sense to consider Fodor’s stated opinions on weaving normativity into concept use.

As expected, Fodor is not very worried about normative import. Though the following passage is written before Brandom’s response above, we might assume that Fodor remains a staunch *naturalistic semanticist*. Fodor states:

“Brandom thinks that the essential insight of inferentialism is that content is a *normative* notion [...]. That is fine with us. But we’re puzzled by what appears to be Brandom’s assumption that you can’t make a

comparable observation if you approach the notion of content from such starting points as truth, truth-condition and the like. As we remarked above, truth is itself a normative notion; it's what you ought to try to believe, all else equal. And, for better or worse, it's part and parcel of contemporary Cartesianism to suppose that truth conditions are what you need to reconstruct notions like representation." (Fodor and Lepore, 480)

Of course Brandom seems to figure that therein lays the real problem: Fodor is missing out on all the most important parts of concept use and intentionality by taking the "contemporary Cartesian" approach. These include, among other things, the particular focus on the distinctly social nature of concept use in thought and language, which means, among other things, an intrinsic connection to normativity. According to Brandom, Fodor is "making intentional soup out of nonintentional bones- more carefully, specifying in a resolutely nonintentional, nonsemantic vocabulary, sufficient conditions for states of an organism or other system to qualify as contentful representations" (Brandom 2001, 587), which is only "[saying] what would count as doing the trick [of intentionality] rather than *how we manage to do it.*" (Ibid) Brandom's story of how we manage to do it is where normativity enters, which is much more substantial than the normativity Fodor takes for granted. It seems the normativity Fodor is satisfied with has little more scope or force than the cold obligation to accept what has been scientifically proven, whereas Brandom's comes out as a phenomenon that is distinctly human and deeply entrenched in the expressive way we use language. With this analysis of the points of contention between these authors' in mind, we can start to formulate how some reconciliation might be possible, while still preserving the stated interests of each side.

It seems evident through their correspondence that Fodor is particularly concerned with the inner 'mechanics' of concepts, while Brandom is primarily determined to enter a substantial conception of normativity into concept-use. The view that will be endorsed here is that these are two sides of the same coin, and that they can be co-habitants on the same coin without any trouble (the coin being the study of semantics, I suppose). In the following section, we will distinguish between different conceptions of the inferentialist thesis, and then see how a weak Sellarsian conception pans out in Brandom to allow it to coexist. Remember, the goal is to formulate a different construal of Brandom's thesis under which he may be able to begin real talks with Fodor, and thus constructively draw upon some of Fodor's "exciting and invigorating" work.

To begin with, we must distinguish between strong and weak construals of Brandom's inferentialist thesis. Strong inferentialism, as described above, states that "broadly inferential articulation is sufficient for specifically conceptual contentfulness- that is, that there is nothing more to conceptual content than its broadly inferential articulation" where its breadth includes "the specifically empirical conceptual content that concepts exhibit in virtue of their connection to language entries in perception and the specifically practical conceptual content that concepts exhibit in virtue of their connection to language exits in action" (Brandom 1998, 131). Weak inferentialism, on the other hand, states that, "inferential articulation is necessary for specifically conceptual contentfulness" (Ibid). The key distinction here is conceiving of inferential articulation as "sufficient" for conceptual contentfulness or as "necessary" for specifically

conceptual contentfulness. Fodor would certainly reject the strong formulation, hands down. However, he would also reject the weak formulation, on the grounds that inference only enters quite late in his story about the conceptual, so late in fact, that it really is not *necessary*. Since Fodor's central epistemology of primitives (which most things are, including doorknobs, see *Concepts: Chapter 6*) uses a strict one-to-one tokening of concepts-to-properties-of-things-in-the-world, we have good reason to believe he would never open content to the Pandora's box of inferentially related concepts at the level of primitives. However, if we use Wilfrid Sellars' weak formulation of the role played by material rules of inference (which we must remember is not the formulation that Sellars actually adopts), we might be able to imagine a different response from Fodor.

In Wilfrid Sellars' "Inference and Meaning" he outlines a formulation of the role played by material inference that would be beneficial to Brandom's discussion with Fodor. The second, weaker formulation states, "While not essential to meaning, material rules of inference have an *original authority* not derived from formal rules, and play an *indispensable* role in our thinking on matters of fact" (Sellars, 257). We can take three essential claims out of this statement:

- A. Material rules of inference are not essential to meaning
- B. Material rules of inference have an *original authority* not derived from formal rules
- C. Material rules of inference play an indispensable role in our thinking on matters of fact

The following interpretation of these claims will suggest that they contain quite a few things that both Fodor and Brandom could agree on. Initially, (A) seems to *encourage* the atomistic conception of semantic *primitives* that Fodor describes, while also still *allowing* inferential role semantics to contribute content to meaning, but not on any *essential* level. Brandom may not be fully satisfied with this, unless Fodor perhaps opted to construe his set of semantic primitives as significantly smaller than originally thought, so that the role that is actually played by concepts that possess bare-essential semantic content is actually fairly minimal, and that in practice, a significant amount of common concepts involve a great deal more content (including content derived from material rules of inference). Of course, this move by Fodor is only imagined in a better case scenario. Brandom may also be intrigued by the "original authority" of material rules of inference described in (B), which we could interpret as not constituting meaning at a basic (physical) level, but perhaps over meaning at another, level where it is used by humans. This may look a lot like a separation of semantics from practice, which would be doing some damage to the pragmatist methodology, and the fact is, it is. If two thinkers as diametrically opposed as Fodor and Brandom are to have some reconciliation, there needs to be some serious damage, but let us permit *some* damage for now. As above, the implications of (C), seem to support what has been drawn out of (B), such that material rules of inference can still offer semantic content that is indispensable to something other than the essence of meaning, namely our "thinking on matters of fact" (and presumably then on speech and actions as well). The picture that we may then draw up is one wherein semantic content exists essentially as atomistic primitives; however these atomistic primitives make up only a portion of the content we use. This may do well to answer to Fodor's earlier concern of which inferences

constitute meaning (in the “natural fact” sense of the word). Furthermore, the inferential chains we form between semantic primitives through experience lend content to them, though not in any way that is *absolutely essential* to their meaning. The content provided by the inferential chains would be understood to make up a significant portion of the concepts we use. So, if concepts that have content from inferential chains are particularly prevalent in human thought and interaction, then much of our concept use, particularly more complex and thus more interesting concept use, is bound up in the normativity that Brandom says is part and parcel of inferential roles semantics. While the balancing of concessions on either side would certainly be a matter for Brandom and Fodor to settle, the key notion of a separate “original authority” that pragmatic semantics commands keeps Brandom’s boat afloat in Fodorian waters. Though this formulation still has a great deal of work to be done (for example in negotiating portions) it is merely a rough starting point at which Brandom may possibly engage Fodor while key points of each author’s thesis are respected to a reasonable degree. In this way, Sellars’ weak formulation allows (with some reasonable concessions) for some common ground to exist between Brandom and Fodor.

Through this investigation, a way in which Brandom might engage Fodor’s naturalist semantic project at a reasonable cost to his normativity has been determined. The strategy adopted has taken its cues from two essential points of contention between Fodor and Brandom, those of methodology and mechanics. Since the motivation for this paper comes from what appears to be Brandom’s repeated desire to engage Fodor’s work, particularly in their correspondence through *The Journal of Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, it is an attempt to see under what circumstances Brandom’s pragmatic-normative view of meaning may interface with Fodor’s naturalistic, informational view. This analysis is by no means meant to be comprehensive, and has left a great deal of development out for the sake of brevity. However, what is important to remember is that if Fodor and Brandom could begin discussion on some common platform, the combined efforts of both their interests could potentially produce some very exciting and insightful results for philosophy and the natural sciences, so it is a project that is, at least in principle, worth a try.

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# Wittgenstein and Dennett on Phenomenological Language

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Abstract: This paper offers a critique of Daniel Dennett's 'heterophenomenology' and 'intentional stance' theories based on insights from the private language argument of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Both Wittgenstein and Dennett attempt to demystify and dissolve the conceptual confusions regarding consciousness through a critical investigation of phenomenological language. In opposition to Augustine's theory of language, Wittgenstein presents his private language argument, which demonstrates how our use of sensation terms lacks the capacity to reference or describe internal mental objects. In reaction to Cartesian internalism, Dennett denies the existence of real mental states by exposing our false confidence in sensation language. Both of their accounts are united in their commitment that independent, public criteria are needed for sensation language to have meaning. However, a deeper comparison ultimately reveals two contradictions internal to Dennett's theories: his hidden reliance on the referential nature of language and his circular account for the meaning of intentional state concepts.

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As two of the most important analytic philosophers in the past century, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Daniel Dennett both embark on projects to demystify consciousness through an investigation of phenomenological language. In his private-language argument, Wittgenstein challenged the Augustinian notion that words referenced mental objects, an overriding assumption of most of the history of philosophy until Wittgenstein's later works. Responding more directly to Cartesian phenomenology, Dennett argued against the existence of *real* mental states by exposing our false confidence in sensation language. Both of their accounts reject Cartesian dualism and suggest that independent, public criteria are needed in order for phenomenological language to have meaning. However, a comparison of the two philosophers – specifically, Wittgenstein's private language argument against Dennett's 'heterophenomenology' and 'intentional stance' theories– ultimately reveals two problems with Dennett's argument. In specific, a Wittgensteinian critique exposes Dennett's hidden reliance on the referential notion of language and his circular account for the meaning of intentional state concepts.

From the first page of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein begins to frame his objection to the Augustinian conception of language. According to Augustine, language consists of a collection of learned words that name objects in one's internal and external environment. A child, for example, progressively learns to associate the objects that their parents point to with particular sound utterances. Wittgenstein notes that, under this conception of language, every word has a meaning, which simply consists of the object it stands for, or its 'ostensive definition' (*PI* 1). As Augustine understands, the language of bodily sensations, such as the feeling of pain, operates by verbally using a sign 'S' for the particular, corresponding sensation (S) that is subjectively experienced. The language of these sensation terms, or the 'private language', consists of a set of words that ostensibly refer to private sensations exclusively knowable to the private linguistic through introspection. According to this account, in selecting which sensation terms to utter, one concentrates inwardly and decides whether he or she is justified in verbally identifying a particular sensation with a particular word.

According to Wittgenstein, however, such a conception of language cannot provide for meaning. Well before his private language argument, Wittgenstein gives example after example that each demonstrate how language functions as a *tool* within a particular practical activity (i.e. shopping for apples, building a stone structure.). In these situations, words are not mediums for communicating thoughts and feelings already *inside* of us, as Augustine would have it. Instead, to use language in a meaningful way within these contexts, or language-games, is to choose to participate in a context-determined rule system, where the determinacy of correct use of terms is already established by community assent.

Nevertheless, as Wittgenstein himself recognizes, with the language-game of sensation terms (i.e. 'pain') it is tempting to adopt Augustine's notion that language has the capacity to describe or refer to our private mental states. Indeed, I am convinced that I have privacy of knowledge (i.e. 'I can know that I'm in pain') and privacy of ownership ('only I can have my pain'). However, in his private language argument, Wittgenstein demonstrates that Augustine's referential conception of language is impossible. His challenge arises not from skepticism of mental content, but of language's ability to ostensibly describe such content. As with all language-games, Wittgenstein upholds that, when we use sensation terms or phenomenological language (i.e. the utterance 'I am in pain'), we operate within the sensation language-game and agree to its pre-established rules. These rules, as they reveal themselves through their *use*, are language-game sensitive and can be more generally understood as the grammar of a language-game. Wittgenstein's grammatical analysis of the language-game concerning the 'beetle and the box' provides a telling example of the impossibility of a private language. There are two rules for this game: first, participants should refer to the content of their box as a 'beetle,' and secondly, participants are prohibited from viewing the 'beetle' of another person's box (*PI* 293). Thus, within the grammar of this language-game, our assent to a standard for correct use of the term 'beetle' does not rely on ostensibly describing what we have in our box. The 'actual' content of one's box plays no role in this language-game. Even if one participant has a beetle and another has a lizard, they both still call the contents a 'beetle' and they can operate within the language-game. As a description of mental objects, Wittgenstein's refers to

the contents of the box as an idle, fifth “wheel” that has no use in the language game (*PI* 271).

The specifics of Wittgenstein’s treatment of the private language can be divided twofold into his critique of its ‘theoretical’ and practical possibility. From the onset, it is important to note that Wittgenstein makes ‘theoretical’ claims only insofar as a private language could not exist for human beings as we know them. Wittgenstein’s investigation of grammar in use does not extend to any metaphysical assertion concerning the existence of a language for any creature in all worlds. As Wittgenstein understands, such a claim could not have meaning because it would not be built out of communal use.

Nevertheless, his denial of the *theoretical* possibility of a private language argues beyond the claim that merely as a matter of fact we cannot acquire language privately. In his objection to a private language in theory, he investigates the viability of an essentially private language: a language that only I can only understand. Here, Wittgenstein provides his diary argument as an example of the *only* way humans could possibly *attempt* to learn and use a language privately. He describes an individual who makes a diary that catalogues the occurrence of the sensation of pain over time. To form a language by one’s self, he or she would “concentrate my attention” on the particular sensation and “speak of it to myself and write it down” (*PI* 258). By continually conditioning myself in this way, I “impress on myself the connection between the sign and the sensation [...] remembering the connection right in the future” (*PI* 258). In the future, however, when it comes time to use ‘S’ again, there is no available, immediate sample by reference to which my future utterance ‘S’ (to myself) can be justified. In essence, there is no criterion for correctness in the future outside my memory of my prior employment of ‘S’ with the past sensation. Any criterion is circular and not an independent check. It is important to recognize that Wittgenstein’s argument here is not a skepticism of the reliability of memory. Instead, Wittgenstein’s point is, even if we had perfect memory, it could not provide a reliable way to determine correct use. Public criteria are needed to ensure consistency of meaning. In Wittgenstein’s diary argument, the private linguistic necessarily, by definition, cannot determine from the onset whether their use of ‘S’ is in accord to some public criteria. In *PI* 260-262, Wittgenstein asserts that our recording of ‘S’ in our diary lacks any linguistically-expressed criteria whatsoever that determine which conditions that private linguist takes note of in deciding to utter ‘S’. An independent, objective measure is needed to determine whether the private linguist’s application of ‘S’ in a present and future case is consistent. In these ways, sensation language cannot, even in theory, obtain meaning privately.

Wittgenstein’s rejection of the possibility of a private language *in practice* arises from his critique of how a child learns the sensation language-game. Here, Augustine’s referential theory of language fails because it happens to be impossible to learn given how, as a matter of fact, we learn language in our upbringing. Under Wittgenstein’s account, when a child is hurt, he is trained to use words to express his pain instead of crying. The child is conditioned to utter ‘I am in pain’, and understood progressively through a process of trial and error. In this way, the child learns psychological vocabulary through public training in which non-verbal pain behavior is gradually replaced by verbal pain behavior. In Wittgenstein’s words, “the verbal expression of

pain replaces crying and does not describe it" (*PI* 244). Hence, when a child articulates pain behavior, he or she does not introspect or "describe it" (i.e. concentrate on what is occurring in some 'inner realm' and ostensibly name it), but instead chooses to express pain behavior in another form (i.e. verbal pain behavior). Because, as a matter of fact, we grow up in communities in which adults train and instruct us in the correct use of sensation words, it is impossible for us to learn a private language. The stage is already set in that, as we learn language, we enter into a pre-established relationship between verbal pain-expressions and pain-behavior. As children, we learn sensation words, and are understood communally, insofar as we have the "right," not the "justification," to use certain expressions (*PI*, 289). Wittgenstein stresses this distinction to illustrate how a child learns the proper use of words by participating in the sensation language game and being positively reinforced if other participants understand –not according to conditioning based on whether our internal state matches our verbal expressions. It makes no sense for the participants of the sensation language game to doubt a child's utterance 'I am in pain'. Generally put, a child learns that, the next time it is about to cry, it is socially acceptable to replace pain-behavior with the utterance, 'I am in pain'. Correctness of use cannot be determined by whether a certain sensation term names the same inner state for all children. It becomes evident here that Wittgenstein upholds that the meaning of sensation talk is constituted by how it is learned. That is, the word 'pain' has meaning in virtue of the child mastering the use of an expression in an established language-game

At this point, it is important to put into perspective both Wittgenstein's practical and 'theoretical' rejections of a private language, so as to avoid a false characterization of behaviorism. In a broad perspective, Wittgenstein's grammatical analysis attempts to dissolve certain confused, conceptual distinctions that have plagued much of the history of philosophy. In this regard, his critique of the 'theoretical' possibility of a private language suggests nothing beyond the claim that the private linguist –in order to speak and be understood in the pre-established grammar agreed upon by the community– needs to identify his words with public criteria. If I want to give meaning to a sensation, S –which very well may exist beforehand as part of my psychological state– then I must participate in the grammar of the sensation language-game.

Wittgenstein's argument against the practical impossibility of a private language similarly remains agnostic towards behaviorism. The manner in which sensation language is learned by a child inscribes and approves certain conceptual relationships that function properly in their respective grammar. For example, Augustine's referential notion of sensation language –later fully integrated into Cartesian dualism– creates conceptual distinctions, such as a separation of an 'inner' and 'outer' realm. If we adopt this inner-outer dualism, certain absurd expressions begin to make sense. Wittgenstein explains that, if the sensation of pain is tied to a detached inner realm, then: "couldn't I imagine having frightful pains and turning to stone while they lasted?" or "how do I know, if I shut my eyes, whether I have not turned into stone?" (*PI* 283). Wittgenstein's point here is, if we conceptually divide the psychologically and physical realms, then these absurd examples of language in everyday use seem possible. The fact that 'I can have your pain' is semantic nonsense –and not some empirical inaccuracy– shows that such a claim, as a matter of fact, is grammatically illegitimate in our sensation talk. Commenting on the referential conception of language, Wittgenstein writes, "this picture



with its ramifications stands in the way of our seeing the use of the word as it is” (*PI* 305). Thus, meaning exists insofar as we decide to adopt the established grammar – and with it the proper conceptual distinctions— of a particular language-game. The proper conceptual distinction acquired by children is not between inner and outer, but instead between two types of outer. That is, the only way to communally understand the use of sensation language rests on how the child learns the distinction between two types of *body*: those resembling living things and those that do not. This connection arises from how a child is conditioned to use the sensation language-game: sensation terms are tied to their expression through their parent’s living body. Under this framework, statements like ‘that rock has pain’ properly do not hold meaning. A child verbalizes behavior by replacing bodily actions (i.e. crying) with the articulation, ‘I am in pain’. Generally put, we are trained not to identify mental events with sensation terms, but to participate in an established way that living things act.

Thus, on both of these accounts, Wittgenstein is not a behaviorist because the grammar of sensation language posits a relationship between verbal and physical sensation behavior that does not reduce, nor identify, one with the other. As children, we do not privately replace pain behavior with sensation terms. Instead, we make this replacement according to the pre-established relationships (i.e. the connection between crying and ‘I am in pain’ or living and non-living bodies) found in our community. Accordingly, we should not disregard behavior because it is precisely how we learn to verbally express ourselves as children. Clearly, sensation talk and pain behavior should not be treated as *independent*, which would ignore how a child learns correctness of use. Most importantly, we cannot reduce or *identify* pain behavior with pain sensation. This is because, firstly, the private language argument holds no metaphysical weight concerning the existence, or absence, of mental events. In this regard, the beetle in the box example demonstrates how the contents of boxes can vary, while we successfully operate within the language game. Likewise, ‘I can have your pain’ is grammatical nonsense not an empirical falsehood; as Wittgenstein insists, “[i]f I do speak of a fiction, then it is of a grammatical fiction” (*PI* 307). Secondly, just as a cry does not describe but expresses an inner sensation, so does the utterance, ‘I am in pain’, express the feeling of pain. It does not make sense to ask whether a cry is true or false, just as ‘I doubt you are in pain’ is grammatical nonsense. Furthermore, the feeling of pain is not identifiable with the utterance ‘I’m in pain’ once we realize that the two operate within different language-games. After a grammatical analysis, the apparent “paradox disappears” when we “reject that grammar which tries to force itself on us here” (*PI* 304). but asserting that they are necessarily expressed in whatever form that is legitimate in our communal sensation talk. The grammar we participate in reveals the sensation phenomena in a meaningful way. Only the meaning of the sensation of pain arises out of the naturalized, behavioral act of expressing. In this way, Wittgenstein’s private language argument simply asserts that the experience of pain alone cannot provide for the correct or meaningful usage of sensation terms. By recognizing that sensation language is not independent but also not thereby identified with bodily behavior, Wittgenstein adopts an anti-behaviorist stance.

All of these conclusions from Wittgenstein’s private language argument challenge Cartesian phenomenology insofar as it categorically assumes the ability of sensation language to reference mental events. In his dualist picture, Descartes divides the world

into two fundamentally distinct but causally connected substances: mind and body. With Descartes' conception of mind as a detached, immaterial substance comes the representation of mind as an inner space, where mental objects and processes exist. Like Augustine's conception of language, the contents of this inner space can be accessed by means of introspection and reported ostensively in everyday language utterances or in an individual's conscious narrative. Descartes does advocate for a sort of phenomenology insofar as introspection and phenomenological language are used to produce knowledge. Within this framework, Descartes adopts Augustine's conception of language as verbal expressions that picture or name certain mental objects or states. Cartesian phenomenology takes the mental narrative of language as a legitimate – although at times obscure – report on what is occurring in the mental realm. The task for the Cartesian phenomenologist is to introspect and form clear and distinct ideas with language as a means to correctly report mental states and eradicate skepticism.

Wittgenstein's critique exposes the theoretical and practical impossibility of the Cartesian conception of phenomenological language. According to Wittgenstein, Descartes misunderstands that sensation grammar is descriptive when in fact it is expressive. The Cartesian picture takes the utterances 'I can only know that I am in pain' and 'only I can have pain' to be claims of epistemic possibility and metaphysical limitation, respectively. As Descartes upholds, our privileged access in these two ways ensures that we have the exclusive and most accurate ability to verbally report about our mental phenomena. However, Wittgenstein elucidates that these claims are only trivial grammatical truths established by the rules of the sensation language-game. He exposes the grammatical confusions (i.e. 'I am in pain' is still true when I turn to stone) created by such conceptual confusions (i.e. mind-body dualism) in his attempt to dissolve these misunderstandings and, with the same stroke, any genuine philosophical problem regarding them. Thus, in response to the assumption of the referential nature of language, Wittgenstein would likely agree with Descartes' critics in their claim that his doubt (i.e. evil demon doubt) was not radical enough.

Reacting more directly to this Cartesian reification of the mind, Daniel Dennett challenges metaphysical dualism and the authority of Cartesian phenomenology in providing information concerning a subject's mental states. Like Wittgenstein, he recognizes that our privileged access to our 'mental realm' creates the false impression that we are in the unique position to most accurately describe its contents. Throughout the chapters of his book *Consciousness Explained*, he exposes our overconfidence in our self-observational skills. According to Dennett, the process of 'reporting' one's apparent mental contents in words is in fact a process of abstracting, theorizing and embellishing, without fear of public contradiction (CS 67). In the spirit of Wittgenstein, Dennett exposes the problems that emerge from the conceptual distinction between an inner and outer realm. If we adopt the picture of a *Self* who examines various *Objects of Consciousness* via introspection, then verbal reports are taken to be simply what the *Self* 'sees' in a mental space. Problems arise from this conception, such as epiphenomenal qualia and the theoretical possibility of a number of visual paradoxes (catalogued on CS 69). Aligned with this critique, Dennett also exposes the ontological problem of the mind. In essence, through an analysis of psychological language, he claims that we do not have sufficient reason to assert the metaphysical reality of mental objects. According to Dennett, the terms 'conscious state' and 'mind' do not refer to any

real kind of entity, nor do these apparent mental states cause behavior in a metaphysical sense. The *contents* of visual experience, for example, are in a format unlike any other mode of representation, and thus cannot provide grounds for their ontological existence.

Similarities with Wittgenstein become evident from this general characterization of Dennett's theory. Both philosophers are concerned with the inner-outer conception that sponsors the Augustinian notion that sensation terms ostensibly refer to mental objects. By recognizing that the term 'mind' does not refer to a real type of entity, we can dissolve any genuine philosophical problems regarding the dualism-materialism debate. Furthermore, Wittgenstein and Dennett are united in their commitment that an objective, independent check is needed to develop a meaningful, scientific account of one's mental states. For Wittgenstein, the sensation of pain is not reducible to, or identifiable with, pain behavior. Moreover, the meaning of sensation terms emerges only insofar as they participate in an established language-game. Similarly, for Dennett, mental reports cannot be objectively verified without a neutral, scientific method of analysis. Furthermore, according to Dennett, mental states are not identical with, or reducible to, brain states and bodily behavior. If we operate within commonsense psychological language, we cannot eliminate mental images because they have served as tremendously successful predictors of sensation behavior.

However, Dennett ventures on to advocate for a new type of phenomenological inquiry that marks a significant departure from Wittgenstein's project. Dennett recognizes that mental states have unparalleled success in predicting behavior. Like Wittgenstein, the truth or meaning of these predictions manifests itself as they participate in verbal expression or sensation behavior. Dennett next posits his celebrated theory known as the *intentional stance*. Dennett's intentional stance states that we should assume that a language-utterer has intentions; "we must interpret it as a record of *speech acts*; not mere pronunciations or recitations but assertions, questions, answers, promises" (CS 76). Dennett's reason for adopting the intentional stance is purely pragmatic: we choose a stance that gives us the best predictive power for the complex subject of humans. Importantly, these invented intentional 'objects' do not have any metaphysical existence. Furthermore, intentional states refer only to particular successful predictions made by them.

In adopting the intentional stance, Dennett can provide a new method of phenomenology that serves to replace the inaccurate Cartesian model. As what he calls 'heterophenomenology', Dennett proposes a way to scientifically analyze conscious reports. After letting subjects describe their conscious experiences, we treat their texts as reports from a *notional* world. Such intentional or notional sensation terms are merely thought of as fictional. Dennett refers to these notional, fictional reports as having the same metaphysical status as the made-up world of London in a Sherlock Holmes novel (CS 79). Nevertheless, the contents of consciousness are reduced to the intentional in this way. Dennett insists that the truth and viability of heterophenomenology is in its ability to dissolve the paradoxes involved with analytic tradition of Cartesian phenomenology. He creates an intentional world consisting of beliefs, hopes, desires, feelings, etc of the subject. The individual's self-report can successfully refer to these intentions. In Dennett's words, "[t]his fictional world is populated with all the images, events [...] that the subjects (apparently) sincerely

believes to exist in his or her (or its) stream of consciousness” (CS 98). Heterophenomenology involves accurately extracting and unpacking texts from speaking subjects. It is up to empirical science to investigate their existence, and, “if real candidates are uncovered, we can identify them as the long-sought referents of the subject’s terms” (CS 98).

Specifically, Dennett’s proposed method can be critiqued from a Wittgensteinian perspective on two fronts. Firstly, Dennett assumes, no doubt inadvertently, that sensation language constituting their intentional texts is fundamentally referential in nature. Even though Dennett has an anti-realist account of mental states, his proposed method encourages the heterophenomenologist to determine what *really* is really going on in one’s mental realm by, in a sense, decoding one’s notional reports. When a subject reports what they sincerely believe to be the contents of their consciousness, they necessarily are participating in the sensation language-game, where determinacy for correctness is pre-established by community assent. However, the task of the heterophenomenologist is to provide a more *accurate* description of one’s notional world by employing objective and descriptive tools such as videos, audio recordings, brain imagining, etc. Thus, no matter how much they analyze subject’s reports, heterophenomenologists can never provide a meaningful account of one’s stream of consciousness. Although intentional states do not represent real entities, even theoretically, his method nonetheless encourages the heterophenomenologist to treat sensation terms as essentially *about* the subject’s feelings, desires, etc. Dennett ignores the fact two people can successfully communicate based on rules of the sensation language game, even when one person has a beetle in their box and the other has nothing. Dennett owes us an account of how sensation actually operates and how it is learned. As it is, heterophenomenology encourages the Augustinian conception of language that was so convincingly proven false by Wittgenstein’s private language argument. In this way, Dennett is guilty of the very crime that he tried to reject from the onset, that is, that our terms regarding conscious experience do not ostensibly point out real mental items.

The second problem with Dennett’s argument is its reliance on circular logic. Under Dennett’s argument, terms regarding intentional states must have meaning prior to our adoption of the intentional stance. When we adopt the intentional stance, we assume that one’s speech acts come from a notional world constituted by intentional states. What determines our application of a certain sensation term to a certain intentional state then? The intentional stance implicitly assumes our mastery of the socially-assented correct use of intentional states such as, ‘desire’, ‘feeling’, ‘pain’, etc. However, as Wittgenstein makes clear, in order to have determinacy of correctness our sensation terms must have a pre-established use in a context independent from that of the notional world. Just as Wittgenstein’s private linguist was forced to assume the correct use of their sensation utterance with their recording in their diary, so does the heterophenomenologist necessarily assume mastery of the particular intentional state concepts. As with his assumption of referential language, Dennett provides no account of how we learn how to correctly use sensation or intentional state concepts. Circularly, one masters the ‘correct’ use of intentional state concepts only in virtue of their adoption of the intentional stance.

For these reasons, Wittgenstein offers a more sophisticated understanding of

phenomenological language. Wittgenstein's account of sensation language game provides a more accurate and comprehensive representation of how sensation terms are used and learned according to pre-established grammatical rules. On the surface it may appear that Dennett's intentional stance marks a similarity with Wittgenstein's account. Indeed, Wittgenstein would agree that by treating other as conscious –and not as “mere automata”– we are already engaged in a *form of life* that informs how we interpret the world (*PI* 420). However, as one of the core ideas that deny any attribution of behaviorism, Wittgenstein would insist his grammatical analysis exclusively rejects the improper use of the grammar of sensation discourse, and with it the conceptual relationships (i.e. inner-outer worlds, name-object pictures of language). Thus, he challenges the viability of Cartesian phenomenology by dissolving inappropriate, dualist conceptions of the world – not via a skepticism of mental content as Dennett attempted. Dennett's ambitious project of forming a new, objective science of consciousness refrained from a description our ordinary sensation talk – even going so far as to deny the metaphysical existence of mental objects.

Generally put, Wittgenstein's private language argument demonstrates the shortcomings of heterophenomenology by revealing its hidden assumption of the referential nature of language, as well as its intrinsic commitment to circular logic. Nonetheless, these two philosophers are united in their positive claims that behavior, speech and feelings concerning sensations each play an important role in phenomenological language. Wittgenstein's private language argument, framed as a response to the Augustinian picture of language, demonstrated the impossibility of privately learning and operating within the sensation language. Perhaps because Dennett more overtly focused his critique on Cartesian phenomenology, he overlooked the need to conduct such a grammatical analysis of language in use. In the end, a critical comparison of their two theories reveals the internal contradictions present in Dennett's heterophenomenology. Likely, adapting this methodology to a Wittgensteinian understanding of sensation utterances as natural replacements for our earlier techniques of expressing behavior would serve to strengthen Dennett's theory. Likely, adapting this methodology to the Wittgensteinian understanding of sensation utterances as natural, socially accepted replacements for our earlier techniques of expressing behavior would serve to strengthen Dennett's theories.

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