

## Unreadable, Notes

robert cheatham / fehta murghana

*"You hawk up and spit on your typewriter and produce a monument of writing disease: bloated, unreadable, 'originality,' the counterpart of your own diseased originality itself."*

### **Crimes of Art and Terror**

Frank Lentriccia / Jody McAuliffe

□ 'Unreadability' is surrounded by a constellation of concepts which both complicate and elucidate as well as frustrate its placement. The 'unreadable' can play host to a whole constellation of confusions, delays, varying intensities, opacities, and intention-alities.

Surely unreadability cannot be purely a perceptual problem -- although the imperceptible must also cross with the seemingly imperturbable figure of that which can't, or attempts to refuse, to be read. It thereby refuses a placement into any certain category except that which can not be read.

But in an age figured by 'transparency' and accessibility what can be the status of the unreadable (does it hide a secret, is it hermetic, or just non-sense?), of an event that refuses to be figured other than by its own refusal?

A whole range of phenomena move within the orbit of the unreadable: certain gnostic poetic texts (some might even say poesis generally, in its emphasis on singular expression); encrypted texts, with varying levels of intentionality, from 'unsolvable' hoaxes to encrypted government texts; mystical or apophantic texts, where the referent is placed necessarily 'one step beyond' (we could include certain philosophical texts here also, as well as the theological); texts of the insane, where there is likewise a radically displaced referent; texts generated by system or machinic failure, either naturally occurring or mimetically induced, as with computer generated texts, where refer-

ence is clearly on THIS side but understanding still falters; historical texts which have lost their cultural, political, or, and this perhaps amounts to a recapping of the first two, historical contextualization and have no apparent Rosetta stone.

And lastly, a very contemporary environment of 'objects' which increasingly demand to be read as 'subject-like' (i.e., language-like, textual), if not actually subjectivity itself: that is, the mute opacities of gestural and semiotic systems, uprooted from their humanistic references and displaced onto or within the cybernetic blur the line between the human and its mechanical other, making each readable by the other, but at the expense of shunting aside what cannot be read. The result seems to range from catastrophe to epiphany, each being all but impenetrable to the other.

The unreadable seems to be about the extreme limit of cognitive and emotional states, a liminal state where chiasmatic reversals are apt to occur just at the moment of 'understanding', where translation becomes suspect, and where stoppage becomes a virtue in search of its own foundation.

□ 'Impenetrable,' 'inexpressible,' 'unpronounceable,' 'untranslatable,' 'unspeakable' all attest to a structure which is by turns blank (white on white, black on black) or a vertiginous density, to the point of being a total singularity.. The would be 'reader' is confronted by a host of 'un-' and 'im-' conditions which act to funnel understanding as well as to deny it. The very appellation 'unreadable' names a black hole-like region whose event horizon is constituted by the inhuman of language 'itself' as it confronts the task of consciousness in attempting to come to grips with itself, to place a standards and means testing on every threshold where the brain would wish to find purchase. The unreadable throws us into system fault which propagates instantly in all directions, temporally and spatially, closing down/opening up avenues of thought and action *before* thought and action can take place (this was formerly the job placement which only the divine could take over: "The unpronounceable is the very thing withheld from revelation, being nameless and therefore having no expression. At the same time, the inexpressible is the very thing that transmits the finite character of revelation." **Metaphysics of the Profane: The Political Theology of Walter Benjamin and Gerschom Scholem**, p99. This 'before-ness' is incorrigibly met before the readable as well as the unreadable, making both architectures haunted by their respective other:

the readable is forever threatening to become un-, while the unreadable forever holds out the lure of becoming known, or at least placed in a field of effects where the unreadable does not remain totally unknown but can be accounted for in any number of ways: hoax, parody, art, useless non-sense, broken part needing to be discarded, faulty system error to be corrected by moving backward through the chain of effects, 'correcting', and then moving forward again. Any attempt to MAINTAIN unreadability rather than correct it must inevitably move in two only seemingly opposed directions: power [the monstrous power of nihilism, that unwanted guest at the table, instantly recognized by Nietzsche] or the weak anarchic distance of the divine numinous, under the guise of 'mysticism,' both relying on the cover story of the 'human' while in fact holding fast at their core to the inhuman.) The fate of the mechanical testing and besting of the unreadable meets no better fate in these terms since it too must round into the mechanical determinations of the inhuman core of the mechanistic. In all of these the human disappears under the blank and unperturbable onslaught of the unreadable, a depthless surface, yet a surface which beckons with the allure of a mirage seen through heat waves, continually moving in it's not-thereness, testimony to its potency, a potency which (only) resides in it's potentiality. A potency which can only manifest in its non-manifestation, in it's threat to become.

□ Undecidable meanings and / or a surplus of meaning, a saturation? Strictly speaking, the unreadable text, like Bartleby the scrivener, can only 'prefer not to'. In fact, the unreadable prefers not to be text at all but to become image; deprived of meaning to emerge from the morass of strokes, the event becomes an icon, an image. The recession of meaning from the ink leaves a residue, a subliming effect, the reverse of ink on blotter, a bare materiality, but a materiality which the mind can never leave well enough alone (and wasn't it ever thus?). Thinking (or rather desiring fervently, desiring beyond desire--does 'thinking' even have much to do with it at this point?) not to be left alone, the mind immediately begins to construct another language; or rather another constellation of relationships based on the visual solely must slowly comb the tangle which the eye is given of the surface (since to the eye everything is a surface) and which is given because...the eye opens. This will always remain the subplot of

the unreadable, a voyaging into mute matter and without benefit of hindsight (or retention or history or prehistory or race, religion or creed) or foresight (or prehention or insight or Law or the coming community of socio-economic variables to put us in our place). This zero degree of meaning is well placed in a letter from Gersholm Scholem to Walter Benjamin in speaking of Kafka's novel *The Trial* as being "where the wealth of significance is gone and what appears, reduced, so to speak, to the zero point of its own content, still does not disappear (and Revelation is something that appears), there the Nothing appears.' (quoted in G. Agamben, **Homo Sacer**. According to the gloss by Agamben, "a law that finds itself in such a condition is not absent rather appears in the form of its unrealizability." Unreadability of a sudden finds itself in the camp which Giorgio Agamben has recently delineated as a constellation of concepts which emerge from singularity ("presentation without representation", the state of exception ("*what cannot be included in the whole of which it is a member and cannot be a member of the whole in which it is always already included*"), and bare life. The unreadable -- it's perverse striving in all directions -- thus seems to take on some of the topological uncanniness that Agamben directly relates to the state of exception [from the Law, rules, life itself] which the sovereign can impose, "*a complex topological figure in which not only the exception and the rule but also the state of nature and law, outside and inside, pass through one another.*" P. 37. Elsewhere Agamben elegantly pinpoints at least one form of that sovereign: "*Language is the sovereign who, in a permanent state of exception, declares that there is nothing outside language and that language is always beyond itself.*" p. 21. Unreadability manages to have its cake and eat it too, a limit-figure, always undecidably on the verge of extinction or explosion.

### □ **Abandon, (un)Reading the Alien**

*"The sole law of abandonment, like that of love, is being at the point of no return and of no recourse."*

Jean-Luc Nancy

Unreadability becomes abandonment, a condition undetermined in both space and time. The very readable text by Arthur C. Clarke titled ***Childhood's End*** details the last days of humankind when its children mutate into another, presumably higher

form of life, under the tutelage of another species of life, the alien. The children eventually abandon the parents and leave with the aliens, having crossed a boundary condition that was unseen and unreadable by the parents. Not mutation but rather abandonment would seem to be the governing motif of all forms of modernity, including the form which has apparently embraced its abandonment, postmodernity. This leaving seems to always be accompanied by unreadability as a threshold condition and liminal state.

One can carry on with 'great abandon.' A centripetal collapse that approaches a great ecstatic release, the foundering of the sexual, the falling of loves of every kind (many times unreadable from the outside): to leave one's self for another place, to be thrown out of one's place. The greatest scientific advances no doubt come through an agency of abandon. It is to leave the safe confines of the human subject and embark on, and as, those dark seas called matter, 'that-ness,' with no safe shore in sight -- but undertaken with joy.

'Abandonment' proceeds with the loss side of the internal split of abandon/abandonment, the self recoiling from its sudden realization that its impoverished state has led it too far. Nothing but a threatening mystery surrounds the concept of abandonment in this latter sense, the queasy aftermath of ecstatic abandon, where nothing can be read with any certainty.

In some of the great tales of science fiction, such as the Clarke novella mentioned earlier ('scientific romances' as the genre was first called), explorers come upon great cities and civilizations which have been abandoned by the lost species that constructed them. A series of baffling encounters follow, as the artifacts, monuments, rules, and outlook of the dead civilization become either more opaque and unreadable -- the thrill coming from this inscrutableness ; or a Rosetta stone is found which seems to open an alien viewpoint, through placing the unreadable next to the readable. This opening of the unreadable frequently leads to disaster nevertheless, confounding the current dictum that 'communication' is all that is needed to solve problems. The shear/sheer (thin, deviating, cleaving from, completely such of what it is -- even the descriptors begin to abandon or at least disperse the site of 'reading') fact of understanding, of reading, acts to transform the reader (of the alien artifact) into a monstrous double of the alien....the nature of the inhuman portent of 'language, the sovereign' outside its alle-

gorical sitings anyway.

Abandonment is held in reserve in the unreadable as at the same time it encourages 'the surprise of the event,' which is also a kind of ecstatic abandon. (And the disaster creates its own ecstatic abandon of a Batailleian sort). The 'progressive' history of the human species, in its excavations of/relations with techne, can be seen as a millennial assortment of leave-takings and abandonments. The unreadable shows this final blank face of abandonment, the ever-closeness of the inhuman --always the source and scourge of any unreadability through either its temporal or spatial avatars: decay, distance--so close as to be a permanent guest of the human host, sometimes an unseen guest, sometimes threatening to take over, abandoning the human host to negativity, the hidden face of the unreadable (as the unreadable is always the hidden face of the readable). The human is always unable to 'read' this parasite --so lovable, so like its human benefactor to the point of often being indistinguishable, unreadable in its difference---to the point of terming unwanted guest (yet, miraculously, always present in some form) 'nihilism,' that most abyssal/abysmal nothing, negative of values lurking in every lump of matter, continual battle of readability with the human, itself a form of rarified matter, reified pattern, which only deepens the abandon.

Just so does the abandonment of and into the unreadable shear into the Hegelian good and bad infinities, Cantor's dust rescending forever, both from the outside in and the inside out.

At the threshold of this event of abandonment by unreadability, philosophy (traditionally, as the finding of what is true in events and not the mere recognition that there is an event) can have nothing to say. Or must lapse into its own solipsistic unreadability.

## □ DIFFICULTY BREATHING, TESTING ONE

Is the unreadable the same as the difficult? At least and depending on which periphery it is situated; depending on the reader, time, place, etc.: what was once unreadable can become merely difficult or imposing, as any first time reader of, e.g., Hegel who has persevered can attest to.

In just this way (the way of 'difficulty,' and the impossibility of reading; sometimes we call it stupidity, a trait everywhere reviled) for the stupid, many things are unread-

able, possess no meaning other than as a slurry of black marks, of positions that can't be fully grasped, of an existence that is only to be lived and not read. (The all but incontestable necessities of stupidity-- "empty repetition and habituation of opinion, stupidity is lodged in the essential possibilities of language itself" -- are traced in Avital Ronell's **Stupidity**. Ronell makes it clear [?] that stupidity shares valuable tensions with difficulty and unreadability. 'Stupidity' and its incapacities, chief of which is incapacity to read or to read with a mechanical and repetitive slur, can be freeing. Or as she puts it, "Outside memory and history, idiocy is our modernity's sliver of sacred emanation." P. 207. It is perhaps only those who don't know, who profess no mastery, who 'should know better' who have unconscionable room to move...and in fact we are all stupid in the final sense that we come upon a universe of matter which we can neither understand nor make to speak -- except to turn it into a likeness of ourselves. The only way forward, paradoxically for Enlightenment style thinkers if there are any left, in these terms is release into matter's repetitions, stupidities, vastnesses of uncontrol and improvisation --- what we would call now 'sacred emanations,' little of which is visible to a population striving to move away from stupidity's opacities and incapacities and into transparency, accessibility, interactivity, and 'the best of all possible worlds'. It is perhaps only in difficulties, unspeakables and unreadabilities where "to engage in such discourse is to abjure clarity [and] to commend oneself to a complementary set of values -- playfulness, improvisation, and freedom itself." John Mccumber, *'The Metaphysics of clarity and the Freedom of Meaning,'* in **Just Being Difficult? Academic Writing in the Public**, ed. Jonathon Culler/Kevin Lamb )

In order to show the difference, those who CAN read events, the 'smart' ones, devise all sorts of testing procedures in order to emphasize the difference between living and reading (and the value of the one over the other), between matter and form, human and animal, man and woman, up and down, black and white, good and evil. You can't tell your differences without a score card and you can't read your score card if it is unreadable.

(From the point of view of ruling hegemonies, subaltern realities are barely real and even if concessions can be made to their realities -- minorities, gays, women, the poor, non-capital intensive enterprises and so on -- they mostly remain as unreadable. This 'matter' may speak but it most often remains mostly not understandable: "Any

attempt of matter to speak thus flies in the face of one of the most basic and dominant themes in Western thought: the domination of matter by form. Matter which speaks, then, can hardly expect to be familiar -- or clear." Mccumber.

□ The emotion most associated with stupidity and unreadability: a sort of dull panic setting in, the fear of testing hanging mutely in the air as a threat to abandonment. One walks away fearing the worse has been hidden...or one sees the visible iconic representation of what cannot be read and one walks away comforted: everything can be meant after all. After panic, when the monolith has dropped down and starts its work, the mayhem of misrecognition assumes the place of the unreadable, taking a slow slide to the circus of action for actions' sake, the gesture then necessary to conclude with the primacy of the image after impossibilities of reading form blockages of thought, the only way out of the logjam is to blast though, catastrophic revelations leading to the elations of fear, disgust, and triumph, apes beating sticks on the ground.

□ Impossible texts: texts that resist approach over time and repeatedly by any number of techniques or persons and can include secret texts or encrypted texts or texts whose reference is an unapproachable referent, i.e., the insane or the mad... or the divine. The most famous example being Judge Paul Schreber. Strictly speaking such a text is not unreadable, but simply unimcompassable. The realities it purports to deal with, are neither fiction nor realities as most would understand it but a kind of imaginal reality as Henry Corbin has it, a parallel universe. What Freud was trying to do with his theory of paranoia (partly retained from encountering Schreber) was to do a 'reading', to convert an unreadable state to one that made some sense--but of course it could only make sense in another system --psychoanalysis.

□ Mystical texts share some of the same problems of unreadability. Their surface textures can be 'read' but if reading means a certain sort of incorporation, they remain unreadable except by those who have elected to become one of those who can give themselves up to unreadableness in order to read at a higher level (of course in many peoples eyes this would not count as any sort of reading, see the Asherites example later on.).



□ And then there are machine generated texts. Everything seems to make a certain...sense. That is, they are readily readable (especially if one doesn't know they have been machine generated) until a certain point when suspicions step in. How is it possible for the machine text to be 'readable'? In a way it's pure readability ensures that there is nothing to be found there, unlike a regular text by a human...one can extrapolate from the text to the life worlds of the writer in at least SOME fashion. With machine text, that is not possible being simply a matter of stochastics and programming protocols (if there are life worlds to be decoded, read there, the reading must make an extra hermeneutic trip -- assuming that the programming language has some connection with a life world.)

**NYTimes Feb 8 2004**

Some academics have predicted the rise of "cryptoviruses" -- malware that invades your computer and encrypts all your files, making them unreadable. "The only way to get the data back will be to pay a ransom," says Stuart Schechter, a doctoral candidate in computer security at Harvard.

□ "...an ambiguous double illumination which strikes us as highly agreeable, as long as we resolutely avoid requiring what once would usually call an 'understanding' of it. Such pages therefore deserve to be called 'sibylline.' Because one cannot take them in and for themselves, but must wait for the occasion when one is specially moved to seek refuge in their oracular quality.' [but surely he is not talking about any specific religious content] 'what he means can only have to do with Hamann's attempt at an impossible 'all-embracing' form of writing."

Goethe quote followed by comment by Benjamin Bennett, from the forward to third volume of **Nazi Psychoanalysis**, Rickels. p.ix

## TESTING, ONE TWO THREE

- Unreadability is often connected with the idea of testing as well as texting, although it is often tied to, in an information economy, a failure of a piece of a technological infrastructure; i.e., a request or test is made telemetrically and the sent results are often unreadable (which is itself read as failure).
  
- Readability as complete as possible is something that every secular, technically-based state (that is, those of Western modernity) strives toward, a form of transparency which precludes secrets, sacrednesses, or any sort of double language of the sort that Leo Strauss examined and approved the necessity of. (*Testing means, among other things, that your pee belongs to the State or to any institutional apparatus that thrives on the new civic readability.*" Avital Ronell, *Nietzsche and the Test Drive*, *MLN German Issue*, vol 18/#3 )
  
- Perhaps there is a place for an endorsement of unreadability, even along materialist lines, such as Fredric Jameson's comment on modern attempts at Utopias at bearing something like a resemblance to an ingrown sublime; or in other words, a contemporary uncanny: *"...something like Bloch's conception of the novel of the artist, which carries the unknown unrealized work of art inside itself like a black hole, a future indeterminacy suddenly shimmering in the present, the absent Utopian sublime suddenly opening up like a wormhole within the empty everyday"*. ( Fredric Jameson, *The Politics of Utopia*, *New Left Review* #25, p. 110)
  
- The uncanny always presupposes a misreading, a *meconnaisance*, the pivotal modernist incarnation of that misrecognition being Freud's misreading of himself in a hallway mirror, viewing a haggard old man approaching him as he is coming out of his study....only to realize it is himself.

## INTENDING THE LACK

□ With the so-called linguistic turn in philosophy, it has been contended that everything has become a text now. If everything has become a text (or has been/can be made into a text -- two different processes?) then the presumption is that the text (of nature, of humanity, of the cosmos, of another language) can be read and if not completely read and inhabited, then at least decoded and correlated, or traced back in its reference points, to the original grid or Rosetta stone that will make translation possible. Everything becomes lateral and connected; nothing can really be 'outside the box' or it would make no sense (per Wittgenstein's dictum that if lions had a language we wouldn't be able to understand it, and the oxymoron of a 'private language').

□ Thus, strictly speaking, an unreadable text would make no sense (even to the point of determining that it would be, in fact, not readable), if it were not, in principal, readable. What 'unreadable' would mean could only be that a key was lost, or that the life worlds that sustained the 'text' has gone, disappeared or drifted out of alignment with our present view of reality, or that something in the machinery has become broken, or a hoax (an intended unreadableness) has been perpetrated.

□ Can there be an intentional unreadability rather than existing as a condition of drift, encoding, or misalignment? The obvious answer would be that of course there can be such intentional unreadability and it is called heightened subjectivity, singularity, or 'art'. There are two sorts of unreadables here: one is perceptual: the pieces normally to be read AS reading material have been altered visually to suggest the context of 'readingness' (linearity, linguisticity or written words meant to convey a meaning beyond themselves, etc.) while in fact subverting any ability to ascribe any meaning to the sequence of 'words' or 'letters'. In any case there is enough similarity to an event in language to make it seem as if a language event is happening but minus the connection with meaning. (Strictly speaking, it may still not be a case of unreadability if the author of the piece is known well enough or if there is previous knowledge of the

work of the author. At some point a psychoanalytic apparatus could be brought in some cases to 'make sense' of the work under discussion or of any of the other 'scientific' protocols for coercing confessions from recalcitrant witnesses. It is perhaps an indeterminate, even unreadable scenario as to whether art is the suffering witness or a witness for the persecution.) The question behind all this questioning: is there anything which cannot be forced to testify, which cannot be forced from a state of recession? Is there anything which can any longer be able to express solely 'I would prefer not to' as in *Bartleby the Scrivener*? The unreadable becomes the place where things prefer not to be possible and for totally unfathomable reasons, not even known really to a *Bartleby* himself....and this capacious world of pure possibility (because it absolutely forecloses any sort of action from the very beginning) only has one end: 'The interruption of writing marks the passage to the second creation, in which God summons all his potential not to be, creating on the basis of a point of indifference between potentiality and impotentiality. [...] This is the irrevocable end of the letter's journey, which, on errands of life, sped toward death. And it is here that the creature is finally at home, saved in being irredeemable.'" Giorgio Agamben, *Bartleby, or On Contingency in Potentialities*.

## TWO HYPOTHESES

□ Perhaps everything is unreadable. That is, everything exists and moves alongside (para-) but does not 'communicate.' (And what is it to communicate anyway? E.g., Einstein's accusation of Neils Bohr's quantum action of occult hanky panky (*spukhafte fernwirkungen* or 'spooky action at a distance') just so isn't 'communication' the chief paradigm of causing effects without intervening substance or articulations? (or rather the interventions are so multifarious, dense and interwoven that direct paths can not be traced; one recalls Benjamin's comments that the efficacy of telepathy is much greater in language than in some etheric substance). The everyday concept of readability or communication is some sort of power or leverage, much like plugging an appliance into a wall socket: a flow of information, or very subtly designed amperage for leveraging, begins movement between sender and receiver, a transferal of 'energies,' that is, activated matter. The ability to 'read' is this ability to cause activation. That which cannot be read resists that activation. 'Unreadability' must then be an ability which is

occulted, hidden: activity which masks itself as inactivity. Unreadability speaks to a confusion of proximity and distance and hence winds up in the country of aura and halo.

□ The unreadable is not an exhausted figure but rather a constant potential figurability, a thwarted readiness to be, or not to be, into a figure of intelligibility. It is a furtive instant, awaiting the coincidence of meaning with ink, an instant which the Islamic sect of Asharites conceive as constant throughout creation: all instances in this existence are unreadable, everything merely contingent on the mind of God, giving rise to "an incessant and instantaneous production of miraculous accidents that cannot influence each other and that are, therefore, independent of all laws and casual relations." (Agamben/Bartleby) In such a scheme of coeval reality how would translation be possible? The disaster has always already happened, leveling everything to single revelatory instant that always is and always will be. Translation is only possible when there

are potential entropic states, unreadability can only happen when there is the possibility of readability and vice versa.

In an age in which the unreadable becomes enfolded with techné as simply a bit of failed production, this nominalist production leaves the arena of faith and becomes coincident with that most uncanny guest, nihilism. Outside the transcendent anchoring of faith, the unreadable must become the leitmotif for sheer blockage in the service of ego, system, or encodings which have been lost, imposed, or fissured in an attempted execution of meaning, temporarily becoming some form of immanent monumentality, for spatially a form of power distribution (and production). Or rather a foiling of power (which amounts to power itself) by proffering a carrot-at-end-of-stick called 'unreadability' but which is at least tenuously connected to the stick of human enterprise, always in the process of being read. Obscure matter would no longer be the province of divine potentiality but rather the designs of process engineers.

This introduction of non-being (and hence evil) is equivalent to the expansion of ego to fill those technical spaces. The potentiality of the unreadable (that is, the potential not to be) exhausts (or produces) itself in figures of immediacy, the technical

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□ From Kristeva's **Prolegomenon to Revolution in Poetic Language (from Art in Theory 1900-1990)** -

*"A materialist foundation to dialectical logic - a theory of signification based on the subject, his formation.. to perceive a signifying practice which, although produced in language, is only intelligible 'through' it ... attests to a 'crisis' of social structures.."*

*"For the capitalist mode of production produces and marginalizes, but simultaneously exploits for its own regeneration, on of the most spectacular shatterings of discourse.. can also integrate their 'process qua process'. As art, this shattering can display the productive basis of subjective and ideological signifying formations - a foundation that primitive societies call 'sacred' and modernity has rejected as schizophrenia ... point to the very process of signification. Magic ... esoterism ... 'incomprehensible' poetry.: the process that exceeds the subject and his communicative structures."*

*"If there exists a 'discourse' which is not a mere depository of thin linguistic layers.. or testimony of a withdrawn body.. and instead.. a practice..the sum of unconscious, subjective.. in gestures of confrontation and appropriation, destruction and construction - productive violence, in short - .. it is the 'text'."*

*"The text is a practice that could be compared to political revolution.. We shall call this heterogeneous practice 'signification' to indicate, on the one hand, that biological urges are socially controlled, directed, and organized, producing an excess with regard to socially apparatuses; and on the other hand, that this instinctual operation becomes a 'practice' - a transformation of natural and social resistances, limitations, and stagnations - if and only if it enters into the code of linguistic and social communication."*

*"What we call 'signification', then, is precisely this unlimited and unbounded generating process, this unceasing operation of the drives towards, in, and through language; towards, in, and through the exchange system and its protagonists - the subject and his institutions. This heterogeneous process, neither anarchic, fragmented foundation nor schizophrenic blockage, is a structuring 'practice', a passage to the outer boundaries of the subject and society. Then - and only then - can it be jouissance and revolution."*

drive to be, to extrapolate, to complete, to calculate.

The only way then that the unreadable can truly manifest is as the disaster, the inferno.

□ Leibniz's monads: "The soul follows its own laws, and the body likewise follows its own laws; and they agree with each other in virtue of the pre-established harmony between all substances, since they are all representations of one and the same universe." Leibniz's proposal for a regularized Universal Language is one of many attempts to extirpate unreadabilities and irregularities based on untranslatability: everything would have to be brought down to the most rational calculative ratios. One could suppose that with Spinoza, unreadability would be a moot point since attributes (of Substance) are only nominally separated from each other as modes of appearance but at base everything is connected and is one with Substance. Perhaps readability would be pointless also, secondary phenomena to and in Spinoza's Substance:

- 17. Everything is either in-itself or in-another.**
- A7: If something, x, can be conceived not to exist, then the essence of x does not entail the existence of x.**
- P1: Substance is logically prior to its modes.**
- P2: Two substances with distinct attributes have nothing in common.**
- P3: Unless two things have something in common, neither can cause the other.**
- P4: Two substances can be distinguished only by their attributes or modes (indistinguishables are identical).**
- P5: Substances can't share attributes.**
- P6: One substance can't produce another.**
- P6c: No substance can be produced by another.**
- P7: The essence of a substance entails its existence.**
- P11: God necessarily exists.**
- P14: Except for God, no substance can be or be conceived.**



## PROPER NAME

□ The proper name as unreadable: The proper name denotes an irreplaceable necessity, irreplaceable but nevertheless opaque, clueless, having to succumb to a visage which simultaneously obscures the proper name's infinitizing quotient. The name's liminality drops off sharply, leaving a singularity that abruptly shuns the false infinitized here and now for a blank hecceity beyond which the hyperanalytic tools of modernity have been anxiously probing ever since Descartes. The entire thrust of psychoanalytic and psychological exploration is to turn the unread into the available-to-be-read. The proper name becomes the *point de capiton* in Lacanian parlance, the convergence of materiality and pattern, a knot or confluence of energies gathered by the name such that gathering/name become synonymous. The name blocks, resists as well as facilitates. At the core of the proper name (of all proper names simultaneously, living or dead) is a non-communicative synchronistic simultaneity, an opaque harmonic.

### □ THREE THESES WHICH ARE ONE (but which one?)

1. The unreadable is a bit of infinity as Hegel conceived it: bound and autonomous, closed off and unavailable, unlike a false infinity of just going on and on. Human history itself comes to seem as some sort of unreadable infinity in this sense, or even better in Benjamin's angel of history, facing backward to the future and staring at the growing pile of debris called 'history.'

2. Perhaps everything is unreadable. We make up stories to allow us to do as we wish, always reading backward through the storm. But in order for reading to be 'reading' and possible doesn't it have to be read forward, into the future? Perhaps everything truly is a consequence of Leibnizian initial conditions: two balls released simultaneously, rolling downhill, slashing water on each other as they go---are they communicating about getting to the bottom?

3. Perhaps nothing is unreadable. 'Unreadability' would be a fiction we tell ourselves to give a small escape clause, a non-transparent loophole, an opaque point de

capiton which gathers the clause into an unavailable pact. Perhaps we think there is some 'freedom' there, some slippery surfaces where grappling hooks of control find no purchase. But perhaps a fiction for all that since everything is contextualized place, everything can be framed, everything can be made into an insignia and emptied in the process---or rather the frame and content made coterminous, the coming techno-transparency of all intentionality in our new vibratory hive-mind of cellularity and constant communication We move into our glorious future together, hive in hand, of one mind, even those who resist become of aid to the process of merging, showing us the holes to be filled the gaps to be mended, the atavistic archaisms to be left behind as all unreadable texts are abandoned and for that matter that would mean that readable texts will have to be abandoned since we will have no need of the peculiar blind insights that reading brings, the embedded historicity that language in fact brings.

#### □ UNREADABLE versus -ABILITY

Unread-ability is an active state, a conferring-of an impasse. It can be an initial state (in the hope that the artifact/text will BECOME readable). 'unreadability' becomes an oxymoron. Any '-ability' is thwarted from the outset but it succeeds in the making of the passive object of scrutiny into an agent behind a scrim. One might say 'this is unreadable' but would we say 'this is unreadability' or even 'this has unreadability'? Could we even with any justification say 'there is unreadability here'? Here, 'Unreadability' would only act as a memorialization, an attempt to create a trans-temporal agency against its will, a holdout against a later potential readability, an -ability that traverses or bridges two incompatibles, acting itself as an encryption-upon-encryption. 'Unreadability' foils canonization even as it courts it (the unreadable shuns it altogether). 'Unreadability' becomes a pyramid, projecting/protecting its dead-but-missing cargo through time.

## □ MONUMENTALITY, DISASTER AND THE UNREADABLE

*"What is a book that no one reads? Something that is not yet written."*

Maurice Blanchot

There is no way to interrogate the unreadable (although unread-ability hints at deferred possibilities).

It doesn't even present a smooth and slippery surface. ("Reading makes of the book what the sea and the wind make of objects fashioned by men: a smoother stone, a fragment fallen from the sky without a past, without a future, the sight of which silences questions." Blanchot *Communication and the Work*. Blanchot's comment would seem to indicate that the readable/unreadable share a chiasmatic relationship: that which is the MOST readable will become effaced, worn down by repeated readings into an 'object' which can only convey it's surface, becoming a pebble on the beach waiting to be found by those who will convert it into an artifact which can be at least seen again, and to have it's unreadability restored. The fault line or liminal zone between the two is the [para]site of the disaster.) It is the zone of merger, the stroke between the monumental and the catastrophic.

The unreadable's jagged irregularities act as catches to be pulled along by the thorns of history, a string theory of the unreadable, but only in the mode of the simultaneity of the unseen and the unheard. One can only 'be with' the unreadable, in a position of the 'para-', the encrypted secret word of the *para-nous*, the parasite, the beyond of the normal; no reader can be inside it or intermixed with it.

The void which Blanchot reserves for the heart of the sculptural -- "*an inaccessible space both evident and withdrawn, perhaps immutable, perhaps ever restless, the contained violence in the face of which we always feel in excess*" -- becomes more and more evident with the unreadable as it approaches an object-state, a thing, moving more toward the *ding an sich* in its decisive separation from the subject-world.

Unreadability is everything we wish it to be and then of a sudden, nothing at all that we know, expect, or share likeness with.

Unreadability shares with the catastrophe and the disaster a density of meaning becoming suddenly an evaporation of meaning.

To monumentalize is to attempt to encrypt the very notion of readability into the farthest future consciousness. It is to raise up to cosmic, mythic levels a perfectly blatant, and in that sense banal, recounting of struggle. But the structures of really deep time only will capture the notion of struggle and not the particularities that surround it, just as an artifact can denote: "this was once 'read'" but not the exact message that it contains. Its very unreadability says that (not its impenetrability but its unreadability; to be unreadable is already to be partly penetrated.)

The monumental already participates in the disaster, or rather, it IS the disaster, the catastrophic, but viewed from 'above' historically speaking, after the debris has settled (Benjamin's backward viewing angel of history). There, the pieces of history, its mute unreadability is forced into focus and comprehension, bound to a frame which makes it readable. The point of art and critique would be to liberate the unreadable INTO its state of singular impenetrability and not to make it into a bound text...or rather to make it a 'text' bound for some place other than text.

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