

Chapter Eight

Possession, or the Name of Mo(u)rning

Mom, or Naming the “Patient”

“My husband was an accountant,” says Mom, 76, “with a big *assurance* company, not insurance, *assurance* company. They did everything but life insurance. He was a wiz; he was really a wiz at figures. He was something else. We came down here, from Boston, in 1972 because in 1971, or 1970, he got sick, he lost his equilibrium, then he gained it back. We moved down here in 1972, after he retired at 53 on a disability. We were here for twenty years and in 1991 he started to show signs of forgetfulness.” That was after 20 years?” I say. “Right,” says Mom, “for twenty years I was with him; I never left his side, I never left him alone because he wasn’t allowed to cross the *street*, if he turned his *head* he’d go *off*, he couldn’t sit at the kitchen *table*, he couldn’t *eat*. That was from 1971 on. This was his condition. We fought it, we went out, but it was a sedentary condition for me. I was really suffocated. It was my husband, I took *care* of him, we didn’t *do* much, we went to the *pool*, we didn’t *do* much, and in 1991 he started to show signs there was something wrong with him. My son, this is apropos, because my son had a cancerous kidney removed in August of 1991 and my husband started to show signs, and of course I couldn’t go up to where he lives because I couldn’t leave my husband, my husband was just in the beginning of dementia then, and he couldn’t be left alone. I knew there was something wrong when a friend of mine called and he said to my husband ‘I’m so sorry to hear about Charles [their son]’ and my husband said, devoted father, good man, a very gentle man, said [in a dismissive voice] ‘Oh I’ve got my own troubles.’ So I

said to my husband ‘What was that all about?’ and he said ‘Oh he’s telling me about somebody who had a kidney removed’ so I knew right away what was going on, but I said ‘well’ he was wrapped-up in himself too much, an introvert mostly, you know, very gentle, very sweet, never raised his voice unless we had an argument, never raised a hand to his son or to me. But, on December 1st, I’ll always remember, he started saying ‘Who are those voices? There’s somebody in the other room’ and I’d say ‘No dear, you’re hearing people talking’ and he’d say ‘I know there’s somebody in the next room.’ ‘Then he started forgetting things and he’d say ‘Why am I *forgetting* these things?’ and I’d say, ‘We all forget things.’”

“I’ll never forget the first of December 1991,” says Mom. “He wakes up, looks at me, and says ‘Who are you?’¹ I thought he was joking and I said ‘Come on’ and he said ‘What happened to my *wife*?’ He wouldn’t let me put a dress on, he’d say ‘That’s my wife’s.’ He had sense enough to call a neighbor, they came running in and he says ‘She’s not my wife, get her outa here.’ Well we git him calmed down and I took him to an important meeting I had to go to, and he sat there saying ‘Help me find my wife.’” “Capgras syndrome,” I say, naming this phenomenon. “Is that what they call it? That’s what happened,” says Mom, “so I took him to our family doctor and he sat there for a half hour with him trying to tell him that I was his wife. You can’t do that, he didn’t see it, he absolutely didn’t see anything. I took him home and I was thinking ‘maybe I triggered something’ because before we were having little arguments about certain things. He was *erratic*. He wouldn’t let me write checks. He wouldn’t let me do

anything. I really was in a terrible state. Finally I said ‘I really don’t think a psychiatrist is going to help him’ and I said ‘I read an article in the paper and there was a place which might help him’ so I said ‘Whattaya got to lose?’ so I brought him to the New Center, and of course they put him through all of these tests and they loved him, they’d say ‘He’s such a sweet man’ and if I’d say ‘Look, there’s Drew,’ he’d say [enthusiastically], ‘Oh *hi* Drew, how are *you*?’ People thought *I* was the crazy one. They really did. This lasted for a while and I got a girl, a nurse to help us, three days a week, and I was going to therapy in the other building. They

said ‘This is an all-together woman; she just needs a therapist, not a psychiatrist, so they assigned one of the doctors under Dr. Bernstein to work with me for a while, and then David [Dr. Bernstein] took over, and he did me a world of good. So *anyway*, I brought him here and he went through the program, sweetest man, he wanted to kiss everybody, but at home there was violence, such violence, and I said to my self ‘How can I control him?’ I didn’t realize you can’t argue with him. I can’t give in to him cuz there are things I have to *do* .”

“How did you maneuver around all that?” I ask. “I’ll tell you,” says Mom, “it was hard, but I had help, from upstairs [David] and I said to him ‘Okay, look, I’m taking care of you until your wife comes back’ and he’d say ‘You gonna leave when she comes back?’ and I’d say ‘Absolutely, she’s put me in charge because she’s not well and she had to go away for treatment, and I didn’t know what to say, but this *calmed* him. ‘But you can’t write the checks!’ he’d say. I had to go change my accounts with another bank

¹ Thus, this morning and her mourning begin in a continual repetition, ever awakening into a new life within *dreama*. This mo(u)rning is and is not a mo(u)rning, lost in the time after the alarm and the snooze

and give him the old check book and say ‘Here it is, you keep it.’ The bankbooks, see he was a wiz at figures, even as bad as he was, this man’s figuring was fabulous. He didn’t know a lot of things. He forgot everything except what happened to him as a child. You know when he was thirteen he had a bar-mitzvah and you recite from the Torah, he could recite it from memory, but he couldn’t remember one day to the next. So I had three days that I’d go away, I used to come for therapy, and then I use to just get outa the house. So I would stay out three or four hours, but still came home to the troubles, and I had such a time doing the bills. He’d say ‘My wife will do it when she comes home’ and I’d say ‘But they’re gonna shut off your phone.’ I pretended to be the housekeeper, that’s the only way I could survive.”

“Couldn’t you do the bills at night when he was asleep?” I ask. “No,” says Mom, “you see he woke up every hour and he’d put the lights on. I didn’t sleep for two years, because every hour he was up and he had a drawer... You see when he retired at 53, they pensioned him off, and every time he’d get his check he’d take off what he’d take to go to work, the same amount every time, and he accumulated it, and if I needed something he’d say ‘Here’s a hundred dollars.’ I had everything I needed. If I wanted something he’d say ‘Get it, get it,” he’d always give me money for it. But when he got *this* way he was a horder, and when he’d go into the bathroom I’d take a pack of the money and hide it, cuz he didn’t remember how much he had. When he went into the home, and I went to his drawer, he had over five thousand dollars there. But it was for me, so I put it all in the bank. Then it was expensive to keep him in the home. I had to put him in a facility

because I was afraid of violence against me. My neighbor said 'I call the police' if I hear you screaming over there' and I said 'Don't do anything unless you hear me pound on the wall,' because I was afraid the police would come and put him in a mental ward, cuz this is what happened to a woman I knew, and I didn't want that. So I did what I thought was the next best thing -- I put him in a very nice home; I can't tell you where cuz I'm in litigation with them now. They killed him," she says, her voice about to break into crying, "he was there two months until I could get him out. It's a terrible story. When it's over I'll tell you about it. He was a healthy man when he went in, except for his Alzheimer's, and he was on medication, his pressure and everything was under control, and they couldn't keep him there because he'd been violent so they put him someplace where I couldn't get to see him, and they never told me he wasn't there. But anyway, it's a horrible story. When it's over I'll tell you all about it. It took me a long time to do this, but I need to punish them for what they did to him."

"So then I came to the New Center," says Mom, "and they gave me special work to do. I do the referral letters. So I'm here three days a week now, for eight and a half hours. I do the intake of all new patients here. I'm the first one they see and, let me tell yuh, let me brag a little bit, they always say 'Its a nice break.' The caregivers, when they come here they're nervous, they're frightened, the patients are very nice and they're glad you're here to help them." I nod my head, thinking she *must* mean that the family members are glad. "I do all the filing, I'm in charge of the filing. I answer the phone. I call the patients for their next visit. I do a lot of copyng. I do a lot of work for the social workers, whatever they need and, uh, I'm after everybody, yuh know, 'Where's the files'

cuz I'm in charge of that." "What do you do with the new patients?" I ask. "I have my papers ready," says Mom, "I have my consent forms. There's one consent form that they're gonna go through the program, and what it entails. On that consent form is one report will go to their doctor and to whomever we want to send them. We never send a report, a summary, to the patient unless they're alone and there's nobody else and they get it. Cuz some of them come and they don't want their families to know. They think its a stigma, because they're coming here you know. So we agree, but otherwise we'll send it to the spouse or to whoever the caregiver is, and whoever they designate. We have these psycho-social forms that we fill out. We do not send anything unless the patient can sign, or the next of kin. We will never give out any information of any reports unless we have a signature. Then we also have a disclaimer that we do not cover the hospital deductible, or dental or mammograms, a whole lot of things. I explain everything to them so they know what they're doing. Then I fill out the psycho-social form and that gives you their whole history." Mom is very concerned about confidentiality, and tells me again and again how she would never discuss someone's diagnosis outside of the clinic. "Whatever goes on in the front office, and we have some fabulous front office there," says Mom, "we work together, they consider me one of them, and I *am* cuz I'm grandee, I went to the cocktail party of the foundation, my name is up on the wall for donating money to the New Center and I'm part of it. So for me this is my baby, my family, these are my people. We're very possessive about our people and our files and we're very careful about what the next person knows, I mean the next *patient*."

“Are the new people usually terrified when they come here?” I ask, “Are they scared of bad news, do you notice when they come in the door?” “No,” says Mom, “let me tell yuh, from my experience, here’s what you do. You see I had a system with Dr. Dandas. We didn’t know each other then. He was just a neurologist and Dr. Rondo was his psychiatrist, you know how they go through the program here, and I would sit in back of my husband and when he said something I would go like this [shaking and then nodding her head] so they would know whether he was telling the truth or not, cuz you know they exaggerate, if you listen to them alone you’d think they’re the greatest people, they know everything right? So we had a system and uh then they call you in for the family conference and they tell you it’s only gonna get worse, and then at first you cry and then you pull yourself up by your bootstraps and then you do what they advise you. They don’t know as much as the social workers and doctors here and if they don’t want to listen, that’s tough, and they’re the losers cuz I know from experience, you listen to them, and you talk it out with them. But that’s the way it is. Sure they cry, they come out with red eyes, the caregivers, and some of them are so far gone, the patients, that there’s nothing you can do for them.”

“What stages did you go through?” I ask. “You go through anger,” says Mom, “I never took it out on him, I would sit there and look at him and cry a lot. You see my husband didn’t care if I cried a lot, what did he care.” “Cuz he didn’t think you were related to him,” I say. “That’s it,” she says, “so I never cried in front of him, and then I stopped crying and said ‘Look, what can you *do*.’ I felt guilty cuz he got sick. At first I thought I triggered something, you think about these things cuz we discussed things.

There was an incident when we were very young, and I lived through it, it wasn't very pleasant, it was, let's say, a *slight discretion*. I said look, in those days, I would be married sixty years in November if my husband were still alive, and in those years you didn't stand up and say 'I'm leaving you, I don't wanna live with you anymore, I'm not *happy* or I need my space of something, you know how people do, you stuck it out. Where do you go, back to your parents, which was horrible. My mother was a very selfish woman, a very domineering woman, and I couldn't live with her for a *minute*, even if she had her own apartment and she had hers I couldn't *live* with her, fortunately we got along and she never knew how I felt. So anyway, there was this *thing* and I never mentioned it at all and we would talk about different things and sometimes something would come up, and then, before he got this, I say 'Whattaya mean? You don't care about your son and you act this way and I didn't really know. There were these little things we were discussing and then I thought I was talking too much and then when he got dementia I realized that he didn't know what he was *saying*. And then you *handle* it, like I say, and I never slept a night cuz if I didn't sleep and I went in the living room he'd say 'Where are you, where are you?' He always wanted me to be there, but he wanted his wife back. I was thinking it was my contradicting him that triggered it, cuz I thought he was just being cute. But we got along, we always got along cuz you know why?" "No," I say. "Cuz I was an *accomodator*," says Mom, "that's the word David used. I was an accomodator and I stopped, for the last five years David said I've done a 180 degree turn-around."

“So would you say that what you went through with him and the disease changed you in a positive way?” I ask. “It changed my life because I was here and I decided that I was not going to stay home and wallow in my grief.” “How did you come to understand his condition through the people at the New Center?” I ask. “They *told* me,” she says, “they *explained* it to me. Diane [a social worker] and Dandas sat together when they told the story and explained to me what the story was, and I’m listening, and they said, you know, and then I started to go to therapy and I’d see Diane once in a while, of course, and then I’d put him in the home in June of 1994 and he was dead by October 8th, my husband’s birthday is when he died.”

“How much of Alzheimer’s disease would you say that you understand clearly?” I ask. “I understand the *whole thing*,” says Mom, without missing a beat. “I understand from the onset until the end, I went through it, and he wasn’t away from me that long, he was never incontinent until he got there [the nursing home]. He probably couldn’t find the *toilet*. I know there are men and women in these homes and they live for *years*. But you know something Drew, it’s a terrible thing to say, but when it gets to the point when it’s very bad God should be good to them and take them. He used to lie there in a coma and I’d say close your eyes please God and take him.”

“Do you feel that the perspective you have of having had to take care of someone with this disease is something doctors and other people who work with them don’t have?” I ask. “Doctors don’t know,” she says, “Let me tell you something Drew, when I started here about three years ago, they gave me a job to do referral letters to the

doctors. When they referred a patient I'd send them a thank you on a beautiful printed letter by Dr. Dandas. When I started only three or four doctors used to refer patients, but now the 30 or 40 new patients we get a month more than half are referred by new doctors. Before they just didn't see it, very few doctors even saw what was coming. Now they're becoming more attuned to it. *My* doctor didn't see it at the time, couldn't understand what was *wrong* with me, couldn't see what was going on cuz my husband was so sweet. It's horrendous to live with a patient who has Alzheimer's. Like I say, if they're ill [like her son with cancer] they've got a mind and you can talk to them, you have a *living being*. Here you've got a body, with no mind and, like my son says, he was really dead two years before he died."

"How do you explain that," I ask, "when you say he had a body with no mind?" "Well I mean the body that, here's this man you live with and he doesn't know what's *going on*, and you're living with somebody, and some of these patients will come and they look like [she makes a zombie-like face], they're worse, at least he could get around." "So he's feeling and he's sensing things and he's suffering," I say, "but he's not..." Mom interrupts, "But he doesn't know what it *is*, and he's *bewildered*, bewildered. 'What's happening to me?' 'What is *this*?' And then he'd go off. Then, once he got into the *real* severe dementia... You cry a lot, and you get angry, not at the patient but at the illness, why is this happening, all of this frontal lobe stuff and the MRI shows they died and Dr. Dandas says that that could have been the cause of his imbalance. But it was *twenty years* afterwards, so I don't know. But the thing is that

they didn't do MRI's in 1978, at the Mayo clinic. We went to the best doctors but no one saw anything."

"After a while with him,' I ask, "didn't everything have to be tactical, every response acted out?" "Yeah," she says, "you have to be careful what you say." "That has to have such an effect on you," I say. "It *does*," says Mom." "Everything's a taboo," I say, "everything you have to *remember* like 'Oh, it worked when I said your wife's coming later or this or that.'" "Yeah," she says, "everything had to be thought out. You have to be careful what you say. When it came to changing the bank accounts over I was a nervous wreck. I never said to God, never I swear to you 'What are you doing to me?' like some of these caregivers, 'Look at me, look what's happening to *me* because of this.'" "Did you ever ask 'Why are you doing this to *him*?'?" I ask. "I didn't *do* anything to him," says Mom. "No, no," I say, "did you ever say that *to God*?" "Oh no," says Mom, "I said 'this is a terrible affliction.' The only time I really felt guilty is when I put him in a home. Up to then I didn't feel guilty cuz I realized I didn't *do* it to him. This was something that was a phenomenon which happened in his *brain*. I used to read and I'd say look at Otto Preminger and look at all of these great people who have died from Alzheimer's. So I could see the great *geniuses* , it doesn't afflict only the poor, or the illiterate. I said this is something you gotta *accept*. It's a malfunction of the brain. They explained everything to me because they showed me the MRI's. Dandas is wonderful. We weren't as close then as we are now, but I spent Thanksgiving with them and everything. They're wonderful people."

“Had your husband ever seen a psychiatrist before he came to the New Center?”

I ask. “No, he didn’t believe in them,” says Mom, “oh he did, he *did* . After they retired him in 1970 we went to a psychiatrist cuz his work had mounted up on him, he lost his balance, he couldn’t get to work, not that he couldn’t *do* his work. So after six months they retired him with full pension. Usually they retire em at less if they’re not 65, but it wasn’t so much so he went on disability and social security. So I took him to a psychiatrist. I made a mistake. I took him to a Freudian psychiatrist who only believed in dreams, and this is when my son says ‘Mom that’s not the one for you and father.’ Anyways, went for a year and it didn’t work. This guy tried to explain to my husband and this guy didn’t realize that he couldn’t go to an appointment alone because he couldn’t cross the streets, and this guy wanted him to come *alone*, and I would wait outside and he’s see me so it didn’t work out. And then we moved to Florida, and he didn’t want to go but Dr. Rondo [a psychiatrist] would see him occasionally. I didn’t care for the Freudian psychiatrist too much. He had different *prices* for everybody and I knew my friend who’s gone to him for maybe ten dollars less, but I didn’t care, if you ask me, but there was something about him and, I dunno, I wasn’t too happy and I didn’t wanna change my husband. Then I realized that psychiatry wasn’t gonna help him; he was too engrained in his own thoughts, and this was his life, this was the way it was gonna be, ‘Leave me alone and let me be at peace’ and we moved down *here*. “Do you think that’s similar to Alzheimer’s,” I ask, “that they want to be independent?” “I don’t think they want to be *independent*,” says Mom, “they’re dependent on *people* but they wanna go at their own pace. Don’t yuh think so?” “What do you mean by ‘their own pace?’” I ask. “You know, *do* for them and leave them *alone*. That’s what *I* gather,

from my husband, as long as you kept him fed. All you can do for an Alzheimer's patient is keep them clean, keep them fed and, uh, keep them quiet. There's nothing else you can do. And I told many a caretaker, or caregiver that 'If you get sick, you aren't gonna be taking care of nobody, and *I* got very sick. Even with the therapy I ended up one day with such a pain in my head like somebody hit me with a bat. Dandas got so frightened and took my pressure and it was over 200 and right away we called Turner [another doctor] and he gave me an injection and said 'I want a CAT scan in *ten minutes!*,' he thought I was having an *aneurism* or something. I took six months to adjust my pressure. Now it's great, it's 130/80. He said 'I didn't know you this well, I can't *believe* it.' But I'll tell yuh, it took its toll on me."

"After so many years never being able to leave his side it must have been devastating," I say. "So," says Mom, looking to continue in some way, "but the thing was, it's *true*, being, uh, I was *possessed* by him. And this is what an Alzheimer's patient *does*, they *possess the caregiver*. I have seen it here, not only *me*. I have *seen* it. They *possess the caregiver* to the point that the caregiver needs more care than the patient. They need therapy, most of them. That's why they have these support groups. Your life changes. You can't talk to these people. If you're living with a mother, brother, sister, father you can't talk to em. They're worse than babies because babies *grow up*. This is a recession into infancy. And then when they become incontinent they're terrible, cuz with a baby you expect all these changings. These caregivers, when I see people just starting here I feel for sorry for them, so I hug them and kiss them and make them feel welcome. But I say to myself 'Thank God I'm beyond it.' I lived it but my case was horrendous,

this does not happen to everybody. What happened to me, and my husband, was horrendous. It should never have happened. That was the home's fault. When I look at them and I see they're dying for the diagnosis I say 'Thank God I'm beyond it.' I don't look on it subjective anymore, but I can be very objective about it. And when they say to them and the caregiver says to me something I know what to do, I don't think too much, and I say 'Look dear, I've been through it, so you can tell me whatever you want. Nobody'll ever hear it from me.' And we become, you know, I'm always so friendly with em, and hug and a kiss and that always eases the burden. I'm a great *hugger*, you know me, I hug and kiss everybody." I smile, nodding. "And the guilt?" I ask. "Then you don't feel guilty cuz they explained to me it was no *fault* of anybody's, of his or anything, it was just that the frontal lobe brain cells died. That's where the thoughts, the memory is or whatever, *whatever* it is, I guess that's it whether I'm right or wrong. Then I said 'I wasn't guilty.' I'll tell you I was absorbed with such guilt and I still am."

Enlightenment II

Max Horkheimer and Theo Adorno like to contrast scientific/Enlightenment rationality with that of magic. "In magic there is a specific representation," they write; whereas in science "representation is exchanged for the fungible—universal interchangeability." "An atom," they tell us, "is smashed not in representation but as a specimen of matter," and in sacrifice (a term used in both magic and science) "a rabbit does not represent but, as a mere example, is virtually ignored by the zeal of the laboratory." To Horkheimer and Adorno magic is understood (as it supposedly understands itself) in terms of representation and similarity. Science, they opine, is

understood in terms of fungibility and abstract identity. The synchrony of signs and the diachrony of symbols are maintained by this view in that magic is seen, in contrast to science, as situation, language and culture specific; as *dynamically* specific. Science ignores transience, they say, “the scientific object is petrified.”

It seems quite clear to Horkheimer and Adorno that enlightenment brought about a change in which symbolism was given up for identity. They can no better imagine a scientist thinking representationally than they can a “pre-enlightenment” figure thinking in terms of identity. Only before Enlightenment does one find a rabbit being treated as a representation, and only afterwards being treated as a specimen “rabbit.” “The shaman’s rites were directed to the wind, the rain, the serpent without, or the demon in the sick man, but not to materials or specimens,” they write, “Magic was not ordered by one, identical spirit: it changed like the cultic masks which were supposed to accord with the various spirits.”

But who says that the shaman does not ‘direct his or her rites to materials or specimens?’ It has been my own contention in many places above that healers *do* in fact often do this. To Horkheimer and Adorno it seems that magic is symbolic in the Romantic sense as outlined in chapter two while science is more akin to the Baroque. “The scientific object is petrified” they say, yet so is the object of Baroque allegory. Yet science *ignores transience* and *fixes* its object they also say, seeming to indicate that science is anti-Baroque (which dwells in the essence-of-life-in-death) *and* anti-Romantic (which dwells in the essence-of-death-in-life). But can Horkheimer and Adorno thus have it both ways? The fact that they seem to think they can is due to what seems to be a

misunderstanding of transience itself. Magic, they say, is “dynamic” and “not ordered by one, identical spirit” (e.g. that of Enlightenment) but by many. It is exactly here, however, in their opposition between “one” and “many” that they err. If, as they say, these spirits which order magic “changed like the cultic masks which were supposed to accord with the various spirits” must we therefore assume, as they seem to, that these changing masks and spirits cannot *also* be thought of in a monist fashion as multiple yet one? In such a monist conception (which I hold to be more accurate) transience and identity blend in the same way as the Stoics blend Divinity with Zeus with *pneuma* with *logos* with destiny, order and so on.

The particular contrast between the shaman and the scientist which Horkheimer and Adorno want to uphold fails on this very point in that both shaman and scientist ignore *and* work with transience, yet in different ways of moving to and from the one and the many (and back again).

Could it be that Horkheimer and Adorno know so much about such shamanic rites taking the particular forms which they attribute to them because these are the forms they themselves practiced? Their shaman sounds so much like those glorious figures of Romanticism ‘O tempest that blows down on me!’ or better yet Pietism with its faith healing—*the* two strongest opponents of the Enlightenment. Whence comes this masking and unmasking animism with which we have lost touch, which we can no longer feel? Have they both not heard that there is a storm blowing from paradise; that this animism was forever lost in the fall, in the acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil? I seem to remember several notices they received in this regard. Maybe they didn’t read

them closely. Why do they seem to ignore this most important part of Benjamin's message; one whom they loved (to envy)? "The magician imitates demons in order to frighten them or to appease them," they write, "he behaves frighteningly or makes gestures of appeasement. Even though his task is impersonation, he never conceives of himself as does the civilized man for whom the unpretentious preserves of the happy hunting-grounds become the unified cosmos, the inclusive concept for all possibilities of plunder.¹ The magician never interprets himself as the image of the invisible power; yet this is the very image in which man attains to the identity of self that cannot disappear through identification with another, but takes possession of itself once and for all as an impenetrable mask." The scientist, Horkheimer and Adorno tell us, possesses an identity which is "an impenetrable mask," a thing which I have attempted to show in the two previous chapters to not be possible. They, along with Maurice Leenhardt and Stéphane Mallarmé, seem to hold that inside this mask of Enlightenment there is some sort of authentic person, or "*do kamo*" but the attainment of which has become increasingly difficult if not impossible. Witness this scene in the following a poem by Mallarme:

The Windows
by Stéphane Mallarmé

Weary of the dull hospital and rank fumes
Rising into the banal whiteness of the curtains
Toward the large bored crucifix of the empty wall,
The dying dissembler straightens his old spine

He drags himself and goes, less to warm his rotting body
Than to see the sunlight on the stones, to glue
The white hairs and bones of his gaunt face

¹ Read here their notion of the modern organization of mimesis involved in Enlightenment, a certain *logos* or rationality which they opine stands in contrast to that which non-Enlightenment groups did or do without. Yet how far away from the Enlightenment ideal a group must be to not be under the spell of this organization is not so clear. Can we imagine a society which is free of a certain Platonism or, better, free of the Symbol as Maurice Leenhardt tires to?

To the windows that a clear sun-ray tries to bronze.

And his mouth, feverish and greedy for the blue azure,
 As once when young it inhaled its treasure,
 A virginal skin and of long ago! soils
 With a long bitter kiss the tepid panes of gold.

Drunk, he lives, forgetting the horror of the holy oils,
 The infusions, the clock, and the inflicted bed,
 The cough; and when evening bleeds along the tiles,
 His eye, on the horizon gorged with light,

Sees golden galleys, beautiful as swans
 Sleeping on a river of crimson and of fragrance
 Rocking the rich tawny flash of their lines
 In a great apathy charged with remembrance!

Thus seized with disgust for man with his blunt soul,
 Wallowing in contentment, where only his appetites
 Eat, and who insists on fetching this filth
 To present it to the woman suckling her little ones,

I flee and cling to all windows which open inside
 From where one turns one's back to life, and, blessed,
 In their glass, washed by eternal dews,
 Gilded by the chaste morning of the Infinite

I look at myself and see me as an angel! and I die, and I love
 — May the glass be art, may it be mysterious —
 To be reborn, wearing my dream as a crown,
 In the anterior sky where Beauty flowers!

But alas! Here-below is master: its obsession
 Sickens me at times even in this safe shelter,
 And the impure vomit of Stupidity
 Forces me to stop up my nose before the azure

Is there a way, O Self who knows bitterness,
 To break open the crystal insulted by the monster
 And to escape with my two feathered wings
 — At the risk of falling through eternity?

In Mallarmé's symbolism we are given a series of images which are best described as scenic reflections—here scenic in that they are a series of vivid scenes, and

reflections in that they occur before (or in) a window (which opens inward) *in* which “the dying dissembler” is reflected and *through* which he looks. But the work is also lyrical; Mallarmé is the window which opens inside, it is he who offers, provides, the reflection and it is he through which the old man (himself) looks. In response to bourgeois life, to the quotidian, a situation in which Mallarmé sees himself in the old and dying Other, he says: “I flee and cling to all windows which open inside” that is, to his Self, but in which he is ever “insulted by the monster” of the Other. “Is there a way,” he asks, looking into the glass, “O Self who knows bitterness, to break open the glass,” i.e. to jar open his Self, step out of the space of death, and escape into angelic bliss? Is there a way in which this death’s head, this monster of the Other, his Self, “the dying dissembler,” can become an angel’s countenance in the here and now, can dissemble in such a way so as to flee the space of death which is life? “I flee and cling to all windows which open inside, from where one turns one’s back to life,” he writes, expressing the death-essence-in-life to which symbolism inevitably returns.

This dying dissembler is the scientist of Horkheimer and Adorno, misunderstood as a dweller within the essence-of-death-in-life instead of a dweller within the essence-of-life-in-death. In Mallarmé’s poem, as in Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Enlightenment*, the scientist interprets himself as the image of an invisible power. In doing so, as Horkheimer and Adorno describe it, he “attains an identity of self that cannot disappear through identification with another but takes possession of itself once and for all as an impenetrable mask.” But this mask is not one thing, “the image of an invisible power” i.e. of the Enlightenment. This mask is the glass and the image of the monster within it,

both secreting their own materiality, affecting and affected by other bodies within, around and apart from them and, while looking like one image is actually a potential series of images or masks. The identity of self attained by the scientist is not Enlightenment but rather Enlightenment is that through and in which the scientist views himself.

Enlightenment is not a spirit as Horkheimer and Adorno (or Mallarmé for that matter) imagine it to be. It is not a system of signs and/or images in the glass, nor is it writing or speech thus imagined. It is rather an identity which we “make out of” these signs and images, which we observe and name. Enlightenment is a form of logocentrism in which we become identical with images of ourselves, in which our bodies are seen as blended with those in and through which we see these images of ourselves. Along with Mallarmé, one could say that Horkheimer and Adorno, in their resistance to Enlightenment, fetishize the glass and in doing so make it no longer apart of ourselves but into some force-field beyond us. Perhaps only in coming to see the glass = the state = the eye = the steam of our breath = the kiss = the air = the spirit = the image = the sun = the walls = the (I)nc. do we come out of the fetish power of glass, of the lens or force-field which make up the knowledge (as opposed to truth) of modern science.

Before coming out of this space-of-death-life, however, and before understanding the importance of the points I have just made, we must again dwell within it learning, from this image, of another essence beyond the essence-of-death-in-life. Mallarmé’s poem, like the thoughts of Horkheimer and Adorno on Enlightenment, begins: “*Las du triste du hôpital, et de l’encens fétid,*” “Weary of the *triste* [sorrowful, mournful, sad, melancholy, dreary, dull] hospital, and the rank fumes.” It is in this space of *tristesse*

that symbolism and semiotics remain but ever seek redemption from. In this fallen state nature (or man) laments, and it (or he) seeks to escape, here in flight, by means of dissemblance, transformation, masking. 'I am not who I am' says man, says nature or, rather, 'You are not who you are' *one says to the other*. In symbolism one must see and speak a series of images which are not ones own; one must understand a language of symbols to approach oneself as Other; one must select from amongst them those which convey a knowing and familiar regard of the Other and which suggest the way *out of* one's own fallen state, one's *tristesse*, and *back into* creation and the living word. The golden light of the great Other, the sun, through the window, tries to enlighten one, to make one like itself, "to bronze" one, to refill one with life, yet only through the dissemblance of symbolism can one reveal, can the Other reveal its, his, or her Self in such a way. Only in this way will the sun receive its due.

To Horkheimer and Adorno "the Enlightenment" is a wholly systematic *enterprise* of knowledge and/or organization of mimesis. Both writers acknowledge gaining inspiration for this idea from Benjamin's critique of epistemology as seen in *Origin*, and in his later work, yet they seem to offer a critique of knowledge which resembles that of Benjamin in its anti-Kantian, and anti-Romantic spirit(s) but which mistakenly sees the organization of mimesis as an organization of *Platonic* mimesis *à la Kant*. It is in viewing mimesis in such a way that Horkheimer and Adorno cannot help but again fail to see the glass for what it is, i.e. as a body inseparable from "their own" and a multiple, monist, causal unity of others. While it is very sustainable that mimesis is organized as they describe, be it through the Symbol or other disciplinary rites, means,

etc. it must also be recognized that while the agent of the Enlightenment (be he or she a scientist or whatever) goes about his or her work, unconsciously or consciously, in the organization of mimesis as construed by Plato, this is not the *only* way in which to understand mimesis or its organization. Rather, what we see in Horkheimer in Adorno is one particular way, a Kantian way, in which mimesis is imagined and its organization is said to be done. It is perhaps of the greatest irony, and one of which Benjamin was surely aware, that in their critique of Platonic mimesis and its modern organization (i.e. Enlightenment) they used an all too Kantian paradigm which did not allow them to escape that very organization or Enlightenment work which they demonized.

Another way to express this problem may be to say that this critique in no way reflects Benjamin's *most important* notion of the dialectical as Socrates-the-spirit-(or *mask*)-of-dialogue, i.e. his very notion of dialectical itself. In their all too frequent equation of Kant with the philosophy of the Enlightenment, they construct, as one would expect in such a dialectical confrontation, what is in essence not a critique of the Enlightenment, but rather a critique of (an all too Kantian) systematicity which they suppose, but suppose falsely, is the chief flaw and danger in the Enlightenment itself. In their critique of this Kantian and, in turn, *Romantic* systematicity and natural philosophy, they write:

The system the Enlightenment has in mind is the form of knowledge which copes most proficiently with the facts and supports the individual¹ most effectively in the mastery of nature.

¹ Note here the notion of support, discussed in chapter six above, and how it could also be read as "mask" (which Horkheimer and Adorno describe as "impenetrable"—a notion which I dispute).

Then, immediately following, referring, as always it seems, to Kant's definition of the enlightenment as one's emergence from a self-incurred immaturity (or minority), they add:

Its principles are the principles of self-preservation. Immaturity is then an inability to survive.¹

In my experience among the Alz people, a people who could well be (and sometimes are) said to suffer from a self-incurred immaturity or minority, the relationship between themselves and their colonial oppressors did indeed rest upon a notion of self-preservation or that which I and Carmen called "necessity." Indeed, the sense of enlightenment held by Carmen, other social workers, and a great many others including physicians, *does* in many significant ways reflect this picture of Enlightenment described by Horkheimer and Adorno. I came to Miami looking for a vicious system of exchange to bear the guilt of the sorrow I saw, and I found one not at all unlike it. Yet, with this vicious economy, with this diabolical system of systematization that I came to see, remained an area which existed outside of it. This area is one of reciprocity, a dialectical realm which I came to describe through Valéry's tie to Benjamin.

In this dialectical realm, which can be seen throughout this entire work to this point, from Willie Mae, to Harwood, to my medical research proposal, we find suggested a system of Enlightenment, an *alternative* system of Enlightenment which has existed since at least the seventeenth century. This system of Enlightenment is not at all

¹ Horkheimer, Max and Adorno, Theodore W. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.83.

systematic in the sense in which we find Horkheimer and Adorno's Kantian system. Not only does it pre-date and survive Kant's systematicity, it also offers a *materialist* sense of "dialectical" which goes beyond the Idealist and Romantic senses of post-Kantian thought. This system is not based on knowledge and symbol, phenomena and noumena (as is Kant's), but rather on truth and essence as Benjamin describes baroque allegory, and upon notions of transcendence and immanence outside of Kantian thought. It was Valéry, in his critique of Mallarmé,¹ who first introduced this "system of truth and essence," and it was Benjamin who, in *Origin*, brought it into the midst of German philosophy and the Frankfurt School, where it was overlooked.

This system of truth and essence is to Valéry what methodical doubt was to Descartes and what the Word, the scene, and reflection were to Mallarmé. Mallarmé described the goal of his own work as giving "a purer meaning to the words of the tribe" and as creating a language which describes "not the thing, but the effect it produces." Mallarmé, as mentioned above regarding the lady dancer, was obsessed with the dance. More precisely, he was obsessed with the effect produced by it. He saw something primitive and pure in it, a *language* which could "give a purer meaning to the words of the tribe." In an 1886 article entitled "Ballets" he compared ballet, with his other, scenic, inspiration – the theater. In this article he tells us that "One art holds the stage, historical with the Drama; with the Ballet, another, emblematic. To be allied, but not to be confused." "Mallarmé," says the French literary scholar F.C. St. Aubyn, "saw the moving dancer as a symbol, "a Sign," and "the visual incorporation of the idea.""² In the

¹ Valéry, Paul *An Anthology*, Lawler, James R. (Ed.) pp.166-170

² St. Aubyn, F.C. *Stéphane Mallarmé*, p.13.

dance, says Mallarmé, is “a pensive delicacy as achieves for example the pleasure found in the reading of poetry.” Valéry describes Mallarmé as beginning in a search for *Truth*, for a poetic principle (which he eventually found). What he found was a metalanguage—not of words or things but of the effects they produce (in him) and/or those which simply “produce him” like the “*Cogito, ergo sum*” of Descartes. In this search, says Valéry:

Language [became] an instrument of “spirituality,” that is to say, of the direct transmutation of desires and emotions into presences and powers that become “realities” in themselves, *without the intervention of physically adequate means of action....*¹ [my emphasis here]. But, as soon as Mallarmé was in possession of his own firm conviction and poetic principle, that is to say, as soon as his *Truth* had *changed into his own true self*, he devoted himself without respite or reservation, without let or halt, to the extraordinary task of grasping in all its generality the nature of his art and, by a Cartesian analysis of the possibilities of language, of distinguishing all its means and classifying all its potential. On one occasion I compared this search to that which led from arithmetic, with its isolated processes, to the invention of algebra.²

Valéry did not become a pure poet in this way, although he started down this path in his younger emulation of Mallarmé. He rather continued the search for truth in a self-conscious way of which Mallarmé would have never been capable. For Valéry, “*Truth*” never “*changed into his own true self*” as it did for Mallarmé, but rather became something which he approached in a fusion of poetry and criticism or, better, of *analysis and lyricism*.

Valéry’s interest in Descartes was not, like Mallarmé, in grasping the nature of poetry by a Cartesian, or algebraic, “analysis of the possibilities of language,” but by a quite different interest in the way Descartes took reason, dreams, imagination and science, i.e.

¹ Note here the affinity between language as Goldstein renders it, and Benjamin endorses (in the previous chapter of this book), and language as “physically adequate means of action” which Mallarmé denies, and Valéry supports.

² Ibid. pp.168-169.

writing these forms of experience together, as a *collective pursuit* towards truth. Of this interest in Descartes Valéry writes:

What delights me in him and makes him so alive for me is his consciousness of himself—*his whole being* summoned to his own attention; a penetrating consciousness of the workings of his own thought; a consciousness so precise and so dominating that it transforms the Self into an instrument whose infallibility depends only on the degree of his consciousness of it.... You will see that I have no great opinion of that substantial part of his work which deals with subjects whose existence or importance he discovered through *other people*.¹

At first regard this statement of Valéry seems to simply reflect Mallarmé's Cartesian analysis in its talk of Descartes' "*whole being*," instrumentality and egotism. Does this not then, we may ask, contradict the important role of the heretofore described Socratic dialectic in Valéry's work? On one hand we seem to have a conversation, a spirit of dialogue and on the other, here in this latter example, we seem to see a rejection of wisdom gained "through other people." Although these two approaches seem to be unresolvably antithetical, it is important to understand how Valéry makes them otherwise. Inspired by Descartes, Valéry pursues what may be called lyrical scientific inquiry. In Valéry's scientific/philosophical investigations we see a mirroring of those of Descartes, especially as found in Descartes' *Discourse on Method*. Valéry writes:

What then do I see in the *Discourse on Method*?

We need not linger over the principles themselves. What attracts me, starting with the delightful account of his life and the circumstances which set him to work, is the presence of the man himself in this prelude to a philosophy. It is, if you like, the use of "I" and "me" in a work of this kind, the sound of the human voice; and it is that, perhaps, which is most sharply opposed to the architecture of scholasticism. The use of "I" and "me" to introduce us to ways of thinking in completely general terms: that for me is Descartes....² I say that the real Method of

¹ Valéry, Paul *Masters and Friends*

² This situation is to a great extent what my book, in its way of presentation, is addressing, i.e. the notion of the lyrical within the dialectics of history, identity and state power. In his book *Margins*, p.294, Jacques

Descartes ought to be called *egotism*: the expansion of consciousness for the purposes of knowledge.... There is no syllogism in the *Cogito*: there is not even a literal meaning. It is a piece of shock tactics, a reflex act of the intellect, a living and thinking being who shouts: “I’ve had enough of it! Your doubt [i.e. that of scholasticism] means nothing to me. I shall invent another that is not useless. I shall call it *methodical doubt* [my brackets].¹

What is the impetus, though, behind this methodological doubt? There is an element of movement in Descartes’ thought which is often overlooked; the spirit of which Valéry captures and transforms. As a young man Descartes pursued a career in the military. During this time, or afterwards (a point of biographical dispute), Descartes wrote a small work entitled “Treatise on Fencing.” This work, now lost, would indeed have been of great value to Valéry. When I imagine Descartes I am reminded of the Spanish word *candela*, a word which I heard time and time again in Miami. *Candela*, literally “flame,” would be used between men to refer to each other as friends. In it we find a complex name which indicates that the other is hot, dangerous, free, uncontrollable, destructive and alive, that he dances like a flame, like the macho rapport between buddies. “I” this, “me” that, “I” did this, she wants “me,” etc.; in *candela* we can almost see, like a flame, the sound of the overbearing male voice. ““I think, therefore I am,” says Valéry, “This is not a piece of reasoning. It’s a fist coming down on the table, to corroborate words in the mind.” In the *Cogito*, says Valéry, there is no literal meaning, so too for the *candela*. “It

Derrida addresses this very issue of Valéry’s understanding and use of a Cartesian inspired lyricism. For Derrida the solution to this odd pairing of Valéry and Descartes lies, as all of his solutions seem to, in a critique of a certain (Platonic) logocentricity within phenomenology and semiotics, while retaining both through the deconstruction of this logocentricity. In this case, however, Valéry’s “violence of the letter,” a notion which is part and parcel to any logocentrism according to Derrida, is not seen for what it is, i.e. not violence *per se* but rather the (“erotic”) interplay between taboo and transgression which, as Bataille reminds us, all language is.

¹ Ibid.

is a piece of shock tactics, a reflex act of the intellect," he says. The *Cogito* is like the dodge, the parry, the thrust and the lunge of fencing; a dance of sorts, a dialectic of activity, of movement. Yet it is at the same time ego, with each hit, with each touch, one says "I," "me," but one *moves*, one *defends*, one *holds back*, with doubt, a methodical doubt.

Such a strange mix this is: of physical assertion, aggression and reservation or trepidation.

It is like a dance, yet a self-conscious dance in which one sees oneself dancing and is thereby uncertain and unfree. Yet how can one be free dancing like this, in the eye of another and many others? Only when it is a question of method, a question of possession, can one be free. This is not poetry or philosophy *à la* Mallarmé, but rather criticism and analysis. One's consciousness of oneself which, in the look of embarrassment or mortification in which one appears to rage like a bonfire, needs to be lowered and dimmed, moved inside, to burn like the small pilot light of the soul, guiding one, being one's self consciousness, but hidden, coolly hidden. This is the secret of the dance and of all method, seeing oneself move, yet dimly and intimately, secreting only enough light to live and move as one must, in accord with one's destiny.

Of this Valérian self-consciousness, this inner Enlightenment, Valéry scholar James R. Lawler describes the necessity within it "to learn a system of images that are preeminently images of the body... and not from any one idiosyncratic meaning in or behind [this expression]." In this way *Bildung*, i.e. formation, forming, creation, or growth *and* , education, culture, or (good) breeding, is (are) key instead of *Bilder*, i.e.

images, representations, or likenesses. In “Dance and the Soul” we see how this learning of a system of bodily images, this *Bildung, as experience* , takes place.¹

Valéry was no fencer, he didn't ride or fight, and within him we find a different form of *candela* , a bit self-consciously erotic, a bit voyeuristic, and even more androgenous. At the beginning of this dialogue Socrates tells us two things about life, which we have, in part, already considered above. First, he tells us that life is (she is, *la vie est*) "that mysterious movement which... transforms me unceasingly into myself" and, second, that it is (she is) "a woman who dances" and whom always transforms back into herself. This dancing woman (*la vie*) says Socrates, *is* "nothing" and "a thing without a body," and with this are introduced two images of the body with and through which we must learn.

This system of images of the body is a system in a way not too dissimilar to the way Benjamin imagines language when he describes it, quoting Paget, as “a form of... the instinct of mimetic movements of expression by means of the body.” As to the *reason behind* the dancer's or life's movements of expression (i.e. language, meta-linguistically regarded), so necessary for a functionalist form of systematic explanation, Socrates says that her movements could be invoking spirits in some demented fashion and thereby, it seems, be sorcery or witchcraft (and her pilot light witchcraft substance) *or* that they could simply *be* demented, displaying no reason at all and thus absurd (like a roaring bonfire). In neither way, however, are her movements a functional system or systematic

¹ It is in working into this dialogue that one comes to see how a system of images is learned.

production or reproduction. The dancer, says his partner Phaedrus then, is the symbolist who makes us aware of "the many relationships between things" in a symbolic-allegorical way, representing "love" by becoming it. According to Socrates, however, the dancer and language [*die Sprache*], according to Goldstein and Benjamin, is she who creates a living relationship in which dance and/or language is "no longer a means, but rather a manifestation, a revelation, of our inner essence and of the psychic bonds which bond us to ourselves and our own kind."

Referring to the dialogue between Harwood and I in chapter two, I wrote that "in Harwood's case enlightenment was pursuing truth, essence and substance (which he links to applied knowledge)." I did not say, however, that Harwood was doing this for himself, for his own enlightenment. In a case very similar to Socrates-spirit-of-the-dialogue I felt, as did each and every dialogic partner of Socrates, it seems, that it was in a certain sense *I* who was pursuing truth, essence and substance and that Harwood seemed to have little interest therein. He refused to discuss anything but the one point at hand which he thought defined his condition and troubles. Enlightenment for Harwood was not about virtue, freedom, rights, disease, stigma or equality: it was all about dialogue, and *dialogue only*. The most dangerous temptation, which I resist here, is to make Harwood in writing that which Plato made Socrates, i.e. a spokesman (a sophist) for causes and ideas which he was not. It is not my cause but the cause of Pietist humanism to deny the guilt with which both Harwood and Socrates have been charged and burdened; a guilt of corruption which they best depict and in doing so use to instruct.

Melancholia I: Learning a System

If the woman who dances is life, then *how* is she so? To *be* life does it not seem that this woman must in some way *represent* life through her dance? *Does* she not, as Phaedrus says, make us aware of "the many relationships between things" in becoming life itself? This, says Socrates, is not the case; she represents nothing, and certainly not anything in a symbolic way. If she does in fact represent anything in such a fashion it is "the body" itself, which she reifies with the help of his companions in dialogue. She makes manifest the idea "*I am felt*, therefore I am" rather than "*Cogito, ergo sum.*" In this way she represents a form of symbolic *Bildung* which Benjamin, in his examination of the Mourning Play, *and* the members of this dialogue, both refer to as "melancholia." In representing in such a way she would be, according to Benjamin, an "allegorization of *physis*" i.e. a fetish. She would be "life" in the Romantic sense of that force, energy or power of animation ever infused with the body. In the spirit of Christianity her body would remain a metaphysical vehicle of human life itself, a metaphor thereof and/or "mother nature."

Contrary to this particular metaphorical and metaphysical view, Socrates seems to opine, and Benjamin would say, the dancer is actually *identical* to everything but *similar* to nothing. This dancer, unlike the symbol, "*stellt nichts vor*" or makes nothing present (in the sense of *Vorstellen*, or representation) but she nevertheless *is* something (that is, "everything" or "creation" if you will).¹ If one is still compelled to represent her, says

¹ Note here the striking similarity to the Stoic conception of the Greek term *genesis* about which Fred Peters, in his *Greek Philosophical Terms: An Historical Lexicon*, writes: "the Stoics are compelled, by their reduction of everything, including perceptible qualities, to body (*poion*), to explain change in a fashion not radically different from the Atomists. They eschewed atomic "hooks," however, and turned to a theory of

Socrates, then imagine her as being a flame, which is to say, as being nothing other than the moment itself. A flame, like Benjamin's depiction of the emblematic, transient nature of the symbol,¹ is a consuming, destructive moment which will never happen again. Of such a symbolic body/*Bildung* (which in Benjamin's conception opposes truth and active creation) Socrates says:

Look at that body, which leaps as flame replaces flame, look how it spurns and betramples what is true! How it furiously, joyously destroys the very place upon which it is, and how it intoxicates itself with the excess of its changes.²

This body of knowledge and *the moment*, this flame, says Socrates, "wrestles with the spirit" in that in destroying "the very place on which it is" it seeks to eliminate that very contradiction of one thing in two places at one time, to eliminate that logic of contradiction upon which knowledge *must rely*.³ This flame/knowledge, says Socrates, "is strangely jealous of that freedom and ubiquity which it thinks mind possesses!" The body, he says, being jealous of the soul in such a way, wants like the soul to be all (everything), but can ever only be one (a thing in the sense of a time, state, or place.) The body, being a flame, is still not movement but rather a succession of *moments*. Thus, thinks Valéry's Socrates, the wisdom we demand from the body is like the wisdom gained through allegorical tragedy before the Mourning Play. This wisdom is momentary and fragmentary in

the interpenetration of bodies that rests on the distinction of various types of mixtures, and particularly the varieties called *mixis* (for dry bodies) and *krasis* (for wet) where the two ingredients of the mixture totally interpenetrate each other without, at the same time, losing their own proper characteristics, a theory used to explain the relationship of soul and body as well.

¹ According to Benjamin it is the very transience thereof which one must allegorize, working oneself into it, preserving transience as in a process of petrification, i.e. *of naming*.

² Valéry, Paul "Dance and the Soul" in *An Anthology*, p.320.

³ Although space does not allow, a more detailed analysis of Plato's *Parmenides* and *Cratylus vis-à-vis* these situations would be of use here.

nature, being built up through countless, discrete, jarring movements which define a strange sort of possession. Such an allegorization, as seen in the woman who dances, brings about the effect of Parmenides when he divorced movement (*kinesis*) from being (*on*) which (as any quantum mechanist, being pulled by non-contradiction, knows) leads to contradiction and more importantly the destruction of *physis* causing, as classicist F.E. Peters notes, "the initiation of movement [to pass] to outside agents, e.g. the "Love and Strife" of Empedocles... and the *nous* of Anaxagoras."¹

*

When the idea for his method came to Descartes on November 10, 1619, says Valéry, it came with "so dazzling a light that he could scarcely endure it." "He had so wearied himself," says his biographer Baillet, "that his brain caught fire and he fell into a sort of enthusiasm, which so affected the impress of dreams and visions." "After he had gone to bed," writes Valéry, "he had three dreams of which he has left an account. He even tells us that the Genius which possessed him had predicted the dreams, and that *the human mind played no part in them.*" "He was so struck by all this," says Baillet, "that he began to pray and made a vow to go on a pilgrimage in order to place the affair, which he regarded as *the most important of his life, under the protection of the Blessed Virgin.*"

*

I think here of Mom and her husband. 'I was possessed by him,' she said, 'They possess the caregiver.' After years at the assurance company where "he had so wearied

¹ Peters, Fred *Greek Philosophical Terms*, pp.158-159.

himself” his brain too caught fire and he fell into a state of imbalance which slowly burned for some twenty years. Then the dreams, the *dreama*, began: ‘Who are you?’ ‘Where’s my wife?’ Whatever this Genius was which possessed Mom’s husband, causing this *dreama*, these dreams, as in the case of Descartes, “*the human mind played no part in them.*” This fire burned, this man raged, like a bonfire, his body a body of knowledge and the moment: visits to the Mayo Clinic, breakfast in bed for twenty years, ‘he might go off at any time, any movement might do it.’ This body, like that of the dancer, ‘wrestles with the spirit in that in destroying the very place on which it is it seeks to eliminate that very contradiction of one thing in two places at one time—to eliminate that contradiction upon which knowledge must rely.’ Yet in his dementia, in this *dreama*, in which the human mind played no part, the Genius remains unacknowledged and never given its due. ‘It’s not a mental illness; they’re not crazy; never say dementia to Spanish speakers.’ ‘It’s memory; it’s cognition; it’s the brain cells that died; depression’s okay,’ but its *never* Genius. “It’s like when someone is going to give you a *soup*, made up of things you don’t like that much,” says one social worker, “you don’t want to know about the ingredients because you might not, you know, eat it. I don’t think that’s even *cultural.*” Yet there is knowledge, a knowledge gained through living with these people day in and day out—a knowledge like fencing, a dance, ‘momentary and fragmentary in nature, being built up through countless, discrete, jarring movements which define a strange sort of possession.’ One *could* call this learning a system of images of the body, yet this would not be true to any analogy with the reading of Valéry (as given to us by Lawler above). In order for us to be able to get something from this knowledge we must in turn read (or *apply*) the images of the body given in it and do so in

a way in which we find that particular materiality which each of the images (as masks) secrete.

A strange sort of possession this is indeed for, if its perpetrator is “demented” (like Socrates says of the dancer/life), and this dementia is *symbolically construed*, it could either be a case of witchcraft or magic (e.g. *palo*) or simply without rhyme, reason or purpose. But this strange sort of possession does not come directly in experience but rather through story (description), or a history of these moments which only Mom herself can establish, i.e. as a mask secreting its own materiality. In Mom’s case the New Center helped her make these histories, gave her a soup of things she didn’t like that much, but presented it in a way which she could palate. ‘Where’s my wife?’ and then ‘I’m gonna get you a good anniversary present’ was not construed as ‘I can’t say’ (a sign of Genius?) but rather as a contradiction which threatened to do her in. Here only one side of the gift is acknowledged, the poison. It is not uncommon at all for possession to take on at least three forms, senses or *themes* at once. I write “*themes*” because, again, the narrative, the drama, the *dreama*, is most important in these sorts of possession being named here. In a great deal of West African spirit possession these three senses are most often found in combination, expressing, relating all three at once. These senses are:

A) Possession as in: “My husband is too *possessive*, I’m being smothered.”

B) Possession as in: “He possesses many fine things and substantial properties,” and

C) Possession as in: “He was possessed by an evil spirit” or “He was possessed by a Genius heretofore unknown.”¹

¹ Each of these things, however, must be seen not as events or contexts *à la* symbolism but rather as material *à la* the flame. Like her husband’s brain, and Descartes genius, these senses of possession, these

Most important in Mom's case is how this possession led to a mourning and ostentation which she learned through the New Center. The New Center created an (I)nc. out of her case and gave her another possession, another body in place of that three-fold possession which was killing her *and* from the need to learn a system of images, i.e. to demask him and these images . The key to this new possession is the establishment of a care network which seeks to eliminate the fear generated by the swarm of insignificant things which begged for some interpretation, some explanation. They alleviated her fear of, quashed her inquiry into "what triggered" her husband's change. She was taught to overcome the search for significance in these insignificant things, in the details, in the content and, in doing so, *supposedly* free her mind and body from the possession and melancholia (depression) which threatened her. She would sit alone, crying to herself; her husband didn't care. She was just the housekeeper, but the New Center gave her a voice. There she came to be introduced to the state in a way which she had never before known it. The (I)nc. is a transformative action of the state, an action in which the patient is exorcised from the caregiver and both are made a part of a greater collective, are introduced to a different world of care and Pietism, and are made a part of the activities of the state directed by social workers.

Not at all unlike the case of Mom and others I came to know the German Baroque Mourning Play (a.k.a. Tragic Drama or *Trauerspiel*) was most often set in a scene of courtly intrigue. Such a drama can be seen in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, which portrayed

stories within mourning or ostentation, are masks which secrete their own potentially destructive and

the workings of state changes taking place around the death and/or demise of a (noble) “house” and its holdings. In the New Center this drama, albeit mostly ignoble, yet no less dramatic, was acted out again and again, day in and day out. Each case, in a certain sense, is a Mourning Play which inscribes or transforms *dreama* into drama, and incorporates the lives of each household into its actions. In a quote from *Origin* describing the appeal and success of dramatizing state actions [*Haupt- und Staatsaktionen*] à la *King Lear*, Benjamin could, with one major exception, very well be describing Mom’s interaction with the New Center when he writes:

The passionate interest in the *Haupt- und Staatsaktionen*, in part an escape from pious domesticity, was also a response to the natural affinity of pensiveness for gravity. In the latter it recognizes its own rhythm. The relationship between mourning and ostentation, which is so brilliantly displayed in the language of the baroque, has one of its sources here; so too does the self-absorption, to which these great constellations of the worldly chronicle seem but a game, which may, it is true, be worthy of attention for the meaning which can reliably be deciphered from it, but whose never-ending repetition secures the bleak rule of a melancholic distaste for life.... The deadening of the emotions, and ebbing away of the waves of life which are the source of these emotions in the body, can increase the distance between the self and the surrounding world to the point of alienation from the body. [*In that one comprehended this symptom of depersonalization as an intense degree of mournfulness the concept of this pathological condition became known as one in which every insignificant thing, because every natural and creative relationship to it is lacking, acted as cipher of a mysterious wisdom, in an uniquely productive context.*] It accords with this that in the proximity of Albrecht Dürer’s figure, *Melancholia I* [figure 18], the utensils of active life are lying around unused on the floor, as objects of contemplation [reflection]” [my brackets].¹

The major exception in describing Mom’s interaction with the New Center in this way is that the symbolic integration she underwent there in the (I)nc. disarms the power of mournfulness to lead one through it to mysterious instruction or, as Benjamin puts it,

capricious materiality, but which *may* also lead us to the name of cause.

¹ Benjamin, Walter *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p.140.

to act “as a cipher of a mysterious wisdom, in a uniquely productive context.”¹ As said before, the fallenness of nature and its mournfulness create a situation in which “every natural and creative relationship” to “every insignificant thing” is lacking, suggesting, demanding significance which the (I)nc. must deny and substitute with an explanation based on a finer, purer, reflection of nature. Above all, in doing so one must also deny learning a system of images of the body *à la* Valéry. This symbolic integration, this denial, which is so important to the spirit of the symbolic as seen in Romanticism, is an attempt to recapture “the living word” through creative and natural activity. It relies *heavily* on a primitivist animism which is the basis of its conception of “nature” and “creation” (living word, art, history, etc.). The primitive, being a mighty mimic, supposedly creates a *pure* symbol to represent (name) this or that in nature. This, or this power, is that which Romanticism and Transcendentalism, in their new understandings of symbolism, wish to redeem. The key notion here is that nature speaks and we humans need to re-learn how to listen. This is romantic science (or art/science).

A focus on the baroque teaches us how to better understand a way out of this Romantic frame. It represents nature as fallen, mourning and *tending towards* muteness. Melancholia is the state of true science, one which has been abandoned for the practical productivity of redeeming nature and/or the state of nature. One must come through melancholia to conquer nature, to fight it, to heal. The essence of nature, says Benjamin,

¹ This disarming effect of the diagnostic and “treatment” process could likewise, as the title of the section on Mom and her husband indicates, be described as that which disables or at least inhibits (or prohibits) the process of naming (more on which below). In Stoic terms, as mentioned above, this could be seen as an instance in which interior *logos* is severed from its effect on exterior *logos*, i.e. as an instance of a meta-language which no longer accurately describes the language which it is supposedly describing.

is that it is mute. Man and nature are permanently divorced from one another and knowledge

is their certificate of divorce. Immanence and transcendence are the two sides of nature.¹

Man lives transcendently, swinging now and then (back) into immanence, but always returning. In melancholia we become conscious of this swing, we ponder our time in immanence (the moment, the event which does not exist), we seek essences through doing this. Transcendentalism and Romanticism are essentially anthropological. They see immanence in the primitive and historical ruin. It is through *puer* allegory and symbol, the reasoning of concept and idea which are both transcendental, that one finds knowledge, that one accurately represents the immanent (which they see as the “noumenal”). This purity is gained through history and anthropology.

In Albrecht Dürer’s *Melancholia I* [figure 18, deleted to due copywrite access] we see the utensils of an active life lying around unused on the floor, while amongst them a thinking figure silently broods. This figure and his surroundings represent a science, a way of scientific pursuit, which has been lost and must be regained. These utensils, like the protocols, MRI’s, CAT scans and blood work-ups, as tools of symbolic integration, are only *a part of* scientific pursuit. They and their use serve the *purposes of knowledge*. They help us capture a purer representation, a purer imitation of the living word, a fleeting, historical, anthropomorphic knowledge of creation. Yet they only provide us with the material *out of which* truth and essence are “created,” that is, “told” or “related.”

¹ The border between these two, Bataille explains, is the border over which taboos are transgressed, a border which the transgressor crosses in transgression and then recrosses in his return to taboo.

The jewel offered by this allegorical-melancholic approach to the science of man is an *ur*-historical anthropology. It offers a search for *Ursprung* (of this disease, for example). In using this approach to science I seek, ethnographically, to name the cause (*Ursprung*) through a history of its origin, an origin which is a personal and a social history *in one*. This critique seeks truth and essence through regarding fallen nature (the guilt-laden *physis* which symbolic integration seeks to redeem) while noting and pondering my own swings into immanence, i.e. from taboo into transgression and back again, along with those of the Alz people.¹ An *ur*-historical anthropology offers another way to socialize the medical, possibly without medicalizing the social. It also offers a way to personalize the political instead of, or along with, politicizing the personal.

The “language” of symbolism, whether in poetry, science or politics is, and forever has been, conceived of as a way out. From Kafka’s imitating ape, to the utterance of profanity and chanted mantras symbolist approaches to language have offered swings into immanence and out again. One of the most original gifts is the gift of tongues. Like all gifts this one is both a curse and a transgression (think of Babel) and a blessing or bestowal of sacredness—a present *and* a poison. The problem with language is that it is

¹ In a certain sense, as mentioned above, such a transgression and return, along with marking a crossing from transcendence to immanence and back again, also marks a crossing from discontinuity into continuity and back again. In short, within Bataille’s (anti-Kantian) schema we find we find two sides, both dependent on one another in a monist fashion—one side being discontinuity, transcendence and taboo; and the other being continuity, immanence, and transgression. For a detailed introduction to these notions see Bataille’s *Theory of Religion; The Accursed Share (Vol. II)*; and his *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*.

always offering knowledge, always secreting, where knowledge of secrets may not be wished.¹

One should not, however, overlook this idea of ethnic flavor (of tongues).

Intrinsic

to the synchrony of semiotics and the diachrony of symbolism themselves are the notions that they express some underlying core or essence of how thought springs from and falls upon the soul, or linguistic palate, in this or that language/people. Many of the social activists I worked with seemed to equate the Pietist philosophy of feelings, the community, words, etc., with that of *Hispanidad*. It is important to teach “Hispanics” about disease in a way that is not “threatening.” The supposedly fragile, Hispanic self is thought to be more *sensitive*, prone to shock, quick to wither and die in the wrong soil. The *medicalized social* is ill; it is threatened with extinction by the American word/community, by a form of (I)nc. which must become more Hispanic. It must symbolically retool itself in this way.

Certainly, as the state forces of “the (psycho-)social” maintain, there is a culturally integrative factor here, but one does not at all resist it by making the word/community more

¹ The reaction to this knowledge, to this transgression by means of taboo is, of course, no way out. Without interior *logos* where the taboos of exterior *logos*, as well as the objects of this form of *logos*, are continually transgressed against, exterior *logos* gives only an appearance, and a hope *à la* the Symbol, that somehow altering what is said amounts to altering what is known. In reality, however, the maintenance of such a program of taboo only works to further the need to profane the public secret and pathologize those who do so.

Hispanic. One probably makes it *more* integrative, while appearing to resist it. This process, as I saw it, is not only an example of what Miami is all about, why it is *so* U.S. American, but this process may also reflect the struggle between bio-medicine and social work beyond Dade County. The more bio-medicine tries to medicalize the social to resist socialized medicine, it seems, the more it becomes integrated into the word/community of the social workers. This can be seen with Carmen and with those I have yet to introduce, all of whom medicalize the social and personalize the political, in the caregiver (I)nc., while they *think* they are (unsuccessfully) socializing the medical and politicizing the personal.

Here melancholia is not seen as a means but rather as a barrier to a means. It is that which stands in the way of a symbolic integration into the state which Hispanics are being denied. Most important, say several of the social workers and psychologists I worked with, is to understand that Spanish speakers are *depressed*. ‘Why is this so?’ they wonder; why are “Hispanics” more depressed? The data is definitely there, they *se*. The answer, as I often heard it, is that “Hispanics” *feel* more, are more *expressive*. Mentation, “cognitive ability” or education may be important factors, but they are for the most part barriers, constructions within a people to classify and divide them, to deny that core of *Alzheit*, *Cubanidad*, and/or *Hispanidad* which is the site of healing. In the beginning, in Cuba or Spain, was the living word and, then, came the fall called America. Nature came to mourn and, because it has continued to mourn, is now silent; no one hears the living word. Whither the language/people, the *true* language/people? Lo and behold we find it reasserting itself in those with Alzheimer’s disease. Here those who are still

able, those who still remember, see not the origin of language but rather the origin of *a* language, a people. They see *a mirror opposite* of language as it would be *ur-*historically considered. They see a language, a people, in death and decay, which must be preserved with the hope of some future salvation and redemption—next year in heaven. “*Mamiita, Papiiito, Bendiiiito*” cries Doris, ‘I have left you in *tristesse* and I mourn, though I know, I pray, that my face will meet yours in heaven and we will each see the countenance of an angel.’ But those who still remember have left the crowds of the dead, the thick air of their *tristes tropiques*, and now the air sometimes seems thin and smells of (a) new life. There is still the heat, though, and the sun and the humidity; God be thanked for that. There is great sadness here too, though, *and* there, so *come*, misery loves the company and/or the (I)nc. You are materially poor and we are materially rich; you are spiritually rich, breathing the air of the dead, and we spiritually poor, breathing the ether of the undead, the Word, the community.¹ This is a soup beyond the melting pot.

Why does it seem almost necessary to imagine the Other as melancholic, *as spiritually rich*? Is it to excuse one from the fact of speaking for him or her, and thus transgressing against him or her? Is it to deny the erotic nature of language, that it involves transgression, swinging into and out of immanence if only in silence and for a moment? Is the other like a saint, as Bataille imagines sainthood, tending toward silence, as some ultimate erotist, content in the severing of his or her internal from external *logos*? In the end, when we do speak, whom do we speak for; for a people, a language?

¹ Think here of the Stoic *pneuma*, heat and air, and of the *kamos* and *baos* with their “air” of humanity.

Or do we speak for ourselves as children; myself with chemistry set, encyclopedia,
cowboy hat and plastic six-shooter by my side and Carmen with her plastic stethoscope
healing the Dominican Community of Manhattan's Upper West side?