

Chapter Five

Life History/Natural History

Monkey See

The *Journals of Gabriel* end in a village in eastern Congo, lying just south of the great equatorial rain forest and some 150 km west of Lake Tanganyika. In the main square of this village sits a very old man. None can say from where he came or to whom he belongs, what his name was before. They call him so'o, and some feed him and give him shelter from the rain. He wanders from house to house, from time to time, speaking a language of the strangest sort and, for the most, in this house and that, this time and that, he is understood and listened to. 'So'o, hey monkey,' the kids sometimes shout, and he pretends this time not to hear, and that time he waves. This day, a Sunday in mid-January, is his first and last. He sits, eyes open, on a stool, in the shade against a tree, maybe dead.

The largest part of the *Journals of Gabriel* take place in Miami, at the daycare center, and other places where he would find himself time and time again. They tell, Gabriel tells, of his life and times as "a worker" there and how he came through this experience and back around to himself, life, and all he once loved. The *Journals* confirm, I believe, though in a *realistic* manner so unusual to this age, what I myself wrote in a message to Horkheimer and Adorno. "The *real* test subject, the *real* victim of the Enlightenment is he or she who is *taken* (i.e. "been *had*") representationally, and the

real subject, of the miracle and love, is he or she who has faced the humiliation of mankind and emerged beyond it.”

What do I mean by “realistic?” In his *Journals* Gabriel makes a move which one would never expect and, being an *historical* account, one which seems all the more unnecessary. To put it most directly: Gabriel describes the world *as if* the world were *not* reality, but rather fiction or an alternate reality. That which we know is presented to us as that which is made-up, not in a form of expressionism, impressionism, or even surrealism but rather a form of hyper-realism. In it, one could say, we learn nothing that we do not already know, or, if we do encounter, say, historical facts which we had not been aware of, they offer us no insight into a reality outside of that in which they are presented. Just imagine if, as Gabriel tells us, the result of the colonial wars, as I have described them in the scenes of the daycare center given earlier, were *not true* to reality but rather fictions or alternate realities. Just imagine if, this being the case, the colonial conquest of Pietism were a fiction. Can this make sense? If it were a fiction, whose fiction, whose story would it *be*? If not ours, if not humanity’s, then whose “history” would it be? It could not be history, one would think, though it could be *natural* history. Yet this creates another problem. Natural history is forever too incomplete and inadequate to relate human experience and to provide a vision of humanity which allows it to remain dominant and more in harmony with itself. As history, or as natural history, the *Journals of Gabriel* make no sense, they do not work in that they *deny* both histories a place in reality, naming them as fictional or alternate realities.

What we get in the *Journals*, instead of these two histories, is another history, an *immemorial* history. This history does not respect the world as it is. It does not give it its due. No matter how human it sounds, it cannot help but be what it is—an *Alz* history, a history which, according to the powers that be, is a history of an illness and a people, both demented (or de-instru-mented). Clearly, those who *no se*, what we have in the end is “science fiction,” i.e. fiction and/or science which does not respect the bounds of time or place, does not respect its logics as established and maintained by *Pietist* science. Being fictional, its memory, that which, like experience, it has to sell, comes to humanity in the form of damaged goods. *This memory is taken as “art” and not as “history.”*

But so many a sacrifice has come this way, so many a gift. These strange goods, *bad* goods, come to us full of complexity and contradiction. It could be said, and Gabriel and I often *do* say, that humanity is undeserving of these gifts, as reciprocations, which it so often fails to recognize as such. From *whom* do they come; from *where* do they come? Maybe it is best to leave this to mystery, to trust in some divine power; one which reciprocates but whose return gifts are denied their power by the (I)nc.

On the wall of my study, near to where I write, is a death-mask of Gabriel carved by a skilled craftsman in the village where the *Journals of Gabriel* end. I often stare at it and think of my friend Gabriel as I knew him at the center. At the time I knew nothing of his ideas, his amazing story, and next to nothing about the possibilities of history. In this time before my contact with the *Journals* I would talk to him time and time again during his short stay at the center and, in these times, we would inevitably come back to his favorite subject of “Homo Sapiens.” “Now I’m looking for the pill,” he would say,

“if there *is* one, to convert me from a lost sheep back into a Homo Sapiens.” “You’re not a Homo Sapiens?” I would ask? “No,” he would say, “or if I *am*, I’m a crippled one.” One day, I remember, I asked him how he dealt with the boredom of the daycare center, to which he smiled and replied: “Monkeys, you see, are indecent in that they have no other resources than themselves.”

What we see in these words by Gabriel is not of course natural history but Alz history or what may be described as *an allegorization of natural history*. As a lost sheep, chemist and Alz physician, Gabriel knew very well that he had no chance of being “converted” back into a Homo Sapiens. He knew that the transformation was already well underway; that he would, like those around him, soon be bleating and further incorporated into a symbolic fold of love which he did not care for, from which he ran. Dispossessed and out of the fold he would sit with one of the chemistry books he had written on his lap, unable to read it anymore, to give it the attention it required. He had indeed no other resource than himself. Gabriel’s allegorization of natural history describes an experience beyond *Cogito, ergo sum*. What he experiences is not himself thinking, therefore being human, but rather himself unable to think and therefore unsure of his species. Sitting in the boredom of the center day in and day out he had a lot of time—not to think, but *time-out-of-mind*. His story, the history of his species, yet undefined, is an *immemorial history*, a history beyond memory or record. Being such, his story, this allegorical natural history, appears more like “experience” (which shares these qualities) and less like “history” (which does not). This allegorically natural history is the essence of *dreama*, an allegorical way of being and expressing which opposes the

symbolic ways of being we call “the unconscious” and “the conscious,” “the unknown” and “the known” which constitute the symbolic natural history of id, superego, aggression, the pleasure principle and so on. The question Gabriel answers is not “What is it?” as in “What’s the matter?” or “What’s *wrong*?” It is rather “What *am* I?” He knows *who* he is, but most everything else is in play—where, when, why, how? He also knows what’s wrong with him, but does not *know* anything *per se*. Gabriel is not looking for self-knowledge, for identity, for a record or any other sort of memory; he’s looking for a pill.

The Predicament

Gabriel came to Miami from Havana, arriving on a crowded boat in the middle of the night in Key Largo and being taken in a truck to his mother’s house in Miami’s Hialeah district. Joining his wife and daughter, who had come months before, they all lived in this small house, his wife doing odd jobs here and there and he, through the group of friends mentioned in the preface, “finding work” in the center. Though the “work” was for him quite ignoble, he took it and did his best at it. To be working with these people in a setting that was somewhat reminiscent of the clinic he had left in Havana was at least better than many other jobs he could have found. The goal was to better his English as fast as he could and begin to find a way to work as a physician again.

Due to the circumstances in which he found himself, and for his own good really, his hopes and dreams of overnight transformation had slowly given way to the day to day

pursuit of knowledge and experience wherever he could find it. Through another Cuban Alz physician who had been practicing in America for a long time Gabriel gained access, as a volunteer, to a study of genetically predisposing factors of Alzheimer's disease being conducted at a university medical center. His role in this study amounted to little more than the actual drawing of blood to be screened from the Spanish speaking participants in the study and, while doing so, collecting a bit of family history on the subject of dementia. Since he did not own a car and public transportation was of no use he had enlisted the help of a cousin who would drive him to the home of these families and wait for him in the car while he did his work.

This study, as he describes it, was set to correlate the incidence of dementia within families with the genetic predisposing factor of a certain gene on chromosome 19 associated with apolipoprotein E (APOE) and, in particular, with its 4th allele (APOE 4). Gabriel was told that after a lab assessment, taking some two weeks, the results would be available and that he could also use the data for his own work should he wish to do so, though he knew no one really thought him capable.

It came about by means of a misunderstanding one night, he tells us, that a family he had gone to visit for the study had not been home and he had been unable to get his samples. After a long day of aggravation at the center this was the last thing he needed. Upon returning home in a fit of anger and frustration, Gabriel goes into the bathroom, closes and locks the door and, after staring at himself in the mirror for some time, though he doesn't tell us what he was thinking, sits down, rolls up his sleeve, swabs alcohol on

his forearm and takes a sample of his own blood, filling out the questionnaire with his own family history, secretly making himself test subject #AE11265, a Sr. Hector Ramos. As he sat scratching away with his pencil on these forms, he tells us, he listened to his baby daughter Celia playing with her mother in the next room and began to feel a deep sense of hopelessness. It was with this sample and these forms that he completed his work and, the following day, turned it in to the lab. “In the two weeks that followed,” says Gabriel, “the world changed forever.”

The day after this fateful evening Gabriel arrived late to the center, looking haggard from a late night feverishly studying an indecipherable endocrinology text which he had paid no less than sixty hard-earned dollars for at the medical center’s bookstore. As he sat at the table with three of the people there, sipping a lukewarm cup of diabetic coffee, he stared out the large windows of the room into the locked courtyard where a few people were milling about, seemingly aimless, in the bright Florida sun. Across the room a woman of eighty-five was pounding the palm of her hand on the table screeching “Oye! Oye!” “Listen!” but was being ignored, as she did this some 30 minutes of each hour which passed. A man at the table next to Gabriel was calling out “Cafe, Cafe!” in a coarse, honking voice, to no one in particular, while a Haitian woman of 80 some years also sat next to him, apparently unnoticed, singing strangely haunting melodies akin to Haitian spirituals but which, her daughter had said time and again, “make no sense.” Throughout the room these three sounds were multiplied fivefold by others like them in an endlessly flowing and ebbing tide of commotion.

At times like these, upon reflection in the midst of such chaos, says Gabriel, an irrepressible smile would sometimes come to his face as he was reminded of a zoo or an aviary, filled with the sound of different species calling out all together for who knows what, creating “a strange, and in some sense glorious, din.” Now and then, during these moments, he felt as if anything were possible, that the whole world might be overcome with such a cacophony and that he might follow, moving about the room ooh oohing and aggh aghhing, scratching his underarms with both hands as he swung to and fro like some big chimp, possessed by who knows what and leading to who knows where. Everyone who “worked” at the daycare center must have thought they were in some sense strange to be *accustomed to* this locked room and such goings on within it, he tells us, and most (including myself) now and then succumbed to some sort of “reversion” or another, not at all dissimilar to that which he describes.

But, writes Gabriel, as that “familiar, irrepressible smile” came back to him that particular day, another, “unfamiliar,” thought followed. It occurred to him, only for a moment, that he and the other attendants were the animals in this zoo which he imagined and that they, like animals in a circus or a zoo, “were in some way involved in a sort of drama or performance of which they had only a partial awareness.”

It was two nights afterward, says Gabriel, that he dreamed a familiar form of dream in which he is in an airport which is and is not Habana’s Jose Martí International, and his wife and daughter are there too. He has to return to Habana to see his mother as she is in some sort of trouble but as they wander and wander, asking for the right gate and

time to leave, as time is running out, they are thwarted at each turn. Reason has no place here, though he continually tells himself, his wife and others that he is a doctor and that “doctors are trained to get to the root and to solve problems, to cure,” and that he can and *must* get the right information. “Excuse me,” he would say, a little flustered and bewildered while trying to look calm and normal, “I need to find the right gate for my flight to Habana, it’s very important...” again, looping back, “Excuse me...” and again, looping back “Excuse me...” until sometime, somewhere in night’s long course “this anxious spiral would dissolve into ether from which it came.”

The day after this dream is when it happened. Gabriel was sitting with a client, talking. It was a typical half-conversation, repetitious and seemingly pointless as the old and somewhat frail Juan Garcia, kept getting up, starting off, and then sitting back down as they talked. Gabriel writes of their conversation in quotes as if he had immediately penned it down: “Now I know that I came here a while ago but I’m going home now” Juan says, pointing to the door, “is that the way out? I’m gonna go get my car and...” Gabriel stops watching the TV in the corner for a moment as he listens. “No, it’s locked. You’re scheduled to go home in about 20 minutes in the van, okay? If you’d like to have a seat and wait here for a few minutes, then you’ll all go home together in the van.” Juan looks at him quizzically. “In the *van* huh?” he says, sitting back down as they both stare at the TV for a few minutes and then gets back to his feet. “Well,” says Juan, “I’ll see yuh, cuz I gotta get going because my father’s waiting for me and... is that the way out?” Gabriel looks over to him from watching the news story on TV, trying to understand the fast paced English, somewhat distracted. “All right,” says Gabriel, “see you later.” Juan

takes a few slow, staggering steps towards the door, stops, looks around here and then there, and scratches his chin as he comes over and sits back down next to Gabriel. There is a silence for a moment, writes Gabriel, as they both stare at the TV. “Hey Juan, how’ve you been?” says Gabriel. “Oh, all right I guess,” says Juan. “Listen, I’m looking for a way home and I guess, my father is over there, but I suppose he’s been gone a long time now, so...” Gabriel listens. “Yeah Juan, for some time now,” he says, sympathetically [and with this, magically, the hook is set!]. “Listen,” says Juan, “excuse me but I need to find the right place to go out cuz I’ve gotta go home cuz my father’s waiting and nobody, or everyone I’ve talked to seems to not know anything.”

There is a pause as Gabriel looks at him, trying to repress a smile. Why, wonders Gabriel, was Juan saying that “*everyone* he’s talked to” knows nothing when he has talked to no one but Gabriel himself? Gabriel had seen this so many times, he notes, but had never asked this question. “You’ve been talking to *me*,” says Gabriel. “I’ve been talking to *you*,” says Juan suspiciously. “Yep, to just me.” The old man looks at him, half disappointed half confused. Gabriel admits then to feeling a little playful. “You know who I am?” says Gabriel, admittedly asking an unfair and uncomfortable question of Juan. “Well, yeah...” says Juan, stretching out the last syllable indicating uncertainty and distrust, “I’ve seen you somewhere around here before....” Gabriel smiles. “I’m one of the animals around here,” he says. “You are huh?” says Juan. “Yeah, I’m the Chimpanzee.” “The Chimpanzee?” says Juan, half smiling and maybe going along with it. “That’s right,” says Gabriel “and you’re one of the humans at the zoo.” There is a

pause as if Juan is thinking it over. “Huh!” he says in a tone of surprise, or maybe reflection.

It was then and there, says Gabriel, that a fancy was born which would take him “to the limits of knowledge and back again.” As he had been listening to Juan, he writes, he had remembered *his own* confused dream from the night before and these two recurring experiences then and there came together and through one another. It occurred to him that “here and now,” in contrast to his dream in which he is lost and confused by the transformation around him, that he himself must be a changing character *in a dream of Juan*. What kind of dreams they were, whether waking or whatever, he could not tell, says Gabriel. Yet the idea that he, the whole staff, and maybe the world for that matter, were characters in the dreams of those like Juan seemed, for some reason, odd even to himself, more real to him than any other explanation. In his own dreams, he observes, he remained himself while places, persons and times transformed around him. What he was hearing in Juan, he says, was the voice of someone in a dream, and what he was hearing when he was *with* Juan were the changing voices of (a) dream character(s), his voice unclear and unaware of Juan’s predicament as if that of a dream character and he equally as unable to provide Juan with any way out of it.

As the next ten days passed, writes Gabriel he went about his daily affairs as usual, as best he could, not knowing what to make of his strange new idea. From a medical perspective, he notes, it seemed quite worthless. His first thought was of a study in which patients with Alzheimer’s disease would be given EEG’s in times of acute

confusion to see if the waves found among them resembled those of REM sleep in any way, as he suspected they would. But when all was said and done, writes Gabriel, this and his other concerns “paled” next to the seemingly inconceivable, if not absurd, notion which all of this suggested, namely, that he and others could be dream characters not in another’s dream, for we have all been in such a place and time for someone, but rather, as I refer to as “*dreama*,” in a talking, walking, waking reality of another, who may even be a stranger.

From this point, then, Gabriel was led even deeper into mystery as he began to consider these thoughts in light of the research he had just been involved in and completed involving (APOE 4) genetic factors. Up to that time, writes Gabriel, he had come, along with a great majority of the medical community as a whole, to see this and other alleles, these chemical bonds, as a sort of unused key to be used towards a cure. Although this key had excited him at that time, before these thoughts came to obsess him, *now*, in his obsession with the idea which came to enslave him, he could not help but think of this key ambivalently, as that which could eventually and slowly bring about the end of his and the whole world’s existence. If he and the others of this world were characters in the dreams of people like Juan, he reasoned, then their elimination, their cure, would at the same time be the elimination of humanity.

“But this is crazy,” writes Gabriel following this, albeit none the less crazy than the idea as a whole as he at times found it. “How could such a state of affairs exist?” he asks himself. Were not those like Juan human? In all fairness, after so long at the

daycare center he could only answer: ‘Not exactly.’ It was as if these people had undergone “some sort of transformation,” he writes, “which made them something extra-human, beyond it, maybe in a way in which a baby is beyond a fetus, or possibly even an adult beyond a child.” How to think of it more precisely, writes Gabriel, was a feat he could not manage. Moreover, and somewhat more disturbing, he notes, was the fact that a great many of the afflicted were prone to mutations of APOE related genetic alleles, suggesting, if one would dare, that they could in fact be either evolutionary successors to adult humans or that they may have been another species, amongst us for at least the millennia of recorded history in which we find such dementia existing.

What happens then is the most surprising and disturbing development in his *Journals* to that point. As he ponders his role in all of this, as he most seriously considers his place in this world, *through these ideas and this study*, he comes to a crucial decision or determination. He writes: “As long as some of this group survive to old age and develop this malady, or should we say ‘transformation,’ I and the world will survive in some form.”

But as he worked through this, writes Gabriel reflectively, he was unaware that at that very moment the practice of genetic screening and counseling involving APOE was already underway, growing at a very rapid rate as the need to deal with this terror filled disease was given its first access to a form of “intervention.” Learning this shortly thereafter, he writes, the terrifying reality of his position soon became clear to him: *that he possessed a knowledge which could save humanity, yet which he was in no position to*

express well enough to be believed, heeded and pursued. As if this weren't enough, Gabriel then tells us that he was shortly thereafter led to the conclusion that he must in some way prevent at least some of those with this predisposing genetic make-up from being detected and that he "must prevent a large enough group of them to allow for the many (some 40% of them) which would not develop this malady, which would not transform for one reason or another." 'But what could he do?' he asks reflectively. Certainly he could work as a collector, as a screener somewhere, in some clinic, and fake test results, thus creating a secret predisposed population, but this would be wrong, it would be criminal, and certainly against his oath as a physician. The thought, of course, at that time still remained for Gabriel that he could be wrong or, for that matter, insane. But having gone through this several times, he writes, he came to only one solution: to allow himself and possibly his future children to be the carriers of the gene and to somehow, in the course of his life, find a way to preserve this transformation and, with it, humanity itself.

It was the very day of this conclusion, just after having come to it, that he went to the lab of the old Cuban physician he had been helping, leafed through the test results, and found his alias, #AE11265, to have been found with "no predisposing genetic risks" to this malady and thus no chance for this transformation at all.

The Solution

Here the *Journals* shift back to the predicament in which Gabriel finds himself, situated in the world, on the edge, of an abyss. In order that the world survive, that it

continue to exist, Gabriel must somehow transform himself into one of these people and then secrete this transformation from the rest of the world around him. Having no genetic predisposition to this transformation he becomes all the more despondent until one day shortly thereafter, while talking with his wife he pauses and scratches his chin, forgetting what he had to say, and then a glimpse, a feeling, came over him, that he was, just for a moment, himself *and* Juan, simultaneously. Of this phenomenon, which he had felt before many times, and which I too had often experienced, with many people, but had never noted any importance in, he writes:

It started a week or so after I first came to the center and lingered for the duration of my time there. Every once in a while I'd be speaking with someone, somewhere else, and I'd catch a mimetic glimpse of one of the Alz people I knew at the center. By this I mean that for a short moment I would realize that one of the expressions of those I had come to know had become, if only for that instant, one of my own. These glimpses, as I am here describing them, were not images, *per se*, but rather moments of awareness of oneself in the eyes of another, which in this case, paradoxically, is oneself. At other times, in conversation with this or that person, I would have the urge, which I would suppress, to answer with or say something in imitation of those I knew at the center. Most of these gestures, these glimpses, were those of faces, and most of these things I wanted to say were absurd.

It surely seems that love magic would involve something akin to these mimetic glimpses. As in the magical nature of "liking" itself, such magic would wish to elicit these mimetic glimpses in the beloved, would set up a situation, a revelation, in which ones beloved *realizes* that he or she "likes" one, and that one likes him or her. What a power this is, this stuff of romance. I will no doubt always be under it.

How is it, or *is* it, asks Gabriel, that their obsessive concentration on the face, posture, clothing and so on (which I too noted) led to such possession? He writes:

I call it possession for I cannot think of a better description of it, save to call it mimetic infection—rather sterile, yet appropriate terms for this sort of love. Rather than "infection," if this does not suit you, "affection" may also cover it, for it *is* gestural, and one does in fact affect something, or many things, through this so called magic.

Reading this I remember, though, how Felipa spoke of witches in her town in Colombia: “people might think that someone is, or has this physical...[she doesn’t say attraction], that they *like* them..., they might think that they [witches] take a picture and *like* the picture to do something back to these persons, or they might use some beverage, poison or something, you know, to make them [those with Alzheimer’s or other illnesses] *like* that.” Like, like, like; a common word used in making comparisons, yet much more in the magic of love.

When we speak of magic, however, says Gabriel, we are told that we also speak of representation. On this subject he writes:

I am reminded here of an obscure essay by Georges Bataille entitled “Human Face”¹ in which these subjects are addressed, though with a great deal of philosophical import. Bataille speaks of the condition of shame or humiliation, made possible in the modern era, of one generation being able to view their predecessors through the powerful cultural force we call photography. Our forefathers and foremothers, our past selves, being viewed somewhat barely and directly in a certain time/place/state of pride and confidence which defined the age in which we see them, now seem false and premature *in the eyes of* their more progressed descendants. We see ourselves in them (and them in us), says Bataille, not just in the bare features of their faces, not just as kin, but as something much greater. As a people *represented*, a history, they are embodiments of (and constitute) the greater (and always dubious) categories of nation, ethnic group, a people, or even a species.

The specific example to which Bataille refers in “Human Face” is one in which he and many of his 1930’s Parisian friends are mortified and shamed by a turn of the century photo of a group of presumably small town folk, all dressed up in their Sunday best, and grouped together in front of a hardware store, immortalized in their petit bourgeois “success” and prosperity (or at least in the simulation thereof). The joke or shame created by this photo among its now cosmopolitan audience is not on the people depicted in it, nor is its attendant laughter or rolling of the eyes directed at these people. Rather, the joke or the shame is on the viewers themselves, and the laughter is directed embarrassingly inward. To be more precise, Bataille and his friends (the contemporary viewers) are laughing at

¹ Bataille, Georges “Human Face,” in *October*, 36, Spring 1986. pp.17-19.

themselves *in relation to* those figures in the photo. As Bataille puts it, the figures in the photo are “a senile mockery,” meaning these figures are a view of the readers themselves as they *were* then *in relation to* their view of themselves as they *are* now. Just as senility in old age, what humanity now sees as the plight of the Alz people, mocks the image of human dignity which youth forms as the norm of being an adult, says Bataille, so does our present perception of ourselves stand in relation to those of a “younger time.” Such photos replace “human nature” with an absurd humiliation or embarrassment. One could say that they do not *immortalize*, but rather *mortify*. They act as death’s heads in that they show us the absurdity in all attempts at achieving immortality; they remind or make us aware of the absurdity of “our place in history.” In a wider scope they show us the absurdity of our grand conquests, and of progress toward the Hegelian totality. The people in such photos appear as monsters to those *nouveau* cosmopolitans who would just as soon forget them, Bataille tells us. In coming at them like dinosaurs from some *Jurassic Park* they come as dangerous freaks of nature.

Photography has confronted us here, says Gabriel, with persons who have, like the Alz people, been almost inaccessible. “They tried to hide it,” said Williemaë, “cuz yuh hardly ever *seen* em.” The lens of the camera has broken a natural order of remembering and forgetting; of experience itself, one might be tempted to say. Such photos make us face the greatest specter of all—that of fashion (or better, *mode*), which haunts the museum of history (and has been seen in the museum of natural history as well). *Mode* does not end with the clothes we wear, or the toys we buy and play with, but haunts the entire *mise-en-scene* (Bataille writes “the state of the human spirit”, alluding to Hegel) of our human world, i.e. the dignified set-up of how things should be. The ghostly or spiritual mission of *mode* in this time/state/place, which I call *mise-en-scene*, has been to protect the artifices of human nature, a culture, a people, an era, a species, a *Reich*, an illness, and so on. This specter of *mode* is always at any present time the mark of progress toward and from the cause, but at that same time it stands as the undoing of this mark. Gabriel writes:

We cannot deduce what the future will bring—that is, name the cause—though indeed the dignity of man is invested in the fantasies about it. We live by natural facts, deduced from our mimetic glimpses found in looking at old photos, reading old books, seeing old tools, and so on, that:

- (A) The future will contradict the past, in that those who live in the future will have a different *mise-en-scene* of everyday life, and will know more about the world, be closer to the cause and less inhibited by it, and that
- (B) this future *mise-en-scene* will therefore, as a contradiction, proceed in a rational/orderly way from the present, making it possible in the future to make hypotheses about historical causation and so forth.

“Bataille is bringing us to doubt these “facts,”” says Gabriel, “Hegel, Bataille asserts, never came to face the past in the way we do today, or, if he did, he certainly was clever in excluding this experience from his philosophy.”

When we face our fellow men and women (i.e. ourselves) of the past, as Bataille does in taking in the photo image of the wedding party in front of the hardware store, we experience a contradictory appearance of ourselves and non-selves together in them, in a mimetic glimpse. We see ourselves as absurd because we see them (our former selves) as ridiculously caught up in the *mise-en-scene* of their time (as non-selves, *not* us, as Alz people) but *at the same time* we see our own present *mise-en-scene* in the eyes of our ancestors and of our descendants (the Alz people), if only for an instant, and we are mortified as we stand both in the shoes of our ancestors and our descendants (or of our past selves and our future selves, i.e. the Alz people) at once and “see ourselves as they would and will. Gabriel writes:

This vision of the ‘would and will’ is one in which we are seen without relation, and as bodies to be observed. In this vision the “abstract antinomy of the self and non-self” (as Bataille puts it) is fused for a paradoxical moment causing a collapse of a rational order in the way we view the future proceeding from the present (laid out in the above mentioned “natural facts”). What we have here, in other words, is a realization, in opposition to those facts, that:

- (A) the people of the future (or our future selves) will laugh at themselves through looking at us (or our present selves), in the same way that we laugh at those images of people from our *own* past (or our previous selves) and, therefore,
- (B) all of our vanities about our own progress, and *our own mise-en-scene* , will themselves become a social death’s head for some future other (or our future selves).

In addition, says Gabriel, and most importantly, is the third part of the realization,

- (C) that this process is somehow the way in which we seem now destined to proceed, not in a dignified, progressing climb to absolute knowledge, but rather in an absurd stagnation of the dialectic in which the false dignities of human nature, a people, a culture, a nation, a species, *an illness* and so on may become unable to be taken as seriously as they were in Hegel’s day.

Bataille’s essay, writes Gabriel hinting at his own studies toward transformation, shows an attempt to work out a way of possibly conceiving of, and offering alternatives to, the *mise-en-scene* of his own time, “a time/place/state which *we* now may look back on and laugh, cry, or look away in disgust at (ourselves).” The experiences Bataille describes, says Gabriel, hold the potential to take us beyond Hegelian idealism, to what Bataille refers to elsewhere as “senile idealism” or, alternately, “materialism.”

I often wish Gabriel had written more about his transformation; that he had left us a plan of how he did it. How did he age a lifetime, experience a lifetime, while everyone around him aged but days? We know a camera was involved. We also know that these “mimetic glimpses” of which he speaks played an important role. It was the bonds, the relationships, socially construed, *spiritually* construed, which, like an alchemist, he

sought to manipulate. These bonds and relationships were those of *pneuma*, they were the strange *tonos* which held the universe, as he found it, together. This *tonos* must have been in some way genetic, for he transformed himself not only into a person with a genetic predisposition to this Alz transformation, but also into a person who was no longer a member of *Homo Sapiens*. A pill, he said, was what he was looking for. One would expect so much from a chemist, I suppose, yet there was something more to it which he (fictionally) explains thus:

Today it is not *really* the great organizing principle of Stahl and Hoffman but the *spirits of chemistry*, the key expressions of the great organizing principle and its medical oracles, to which the humans all eventually come on bended knee, sacrifice to and, like the ancient oracles, sleep before, awaiting a sign, an image, a cure (though above all avoiding illuminative delirium!). Those special, representative humans who contemplate in piety are perpetually torn between a sacred possession of knowledge that disease and pain are social, and that which they cannot ignore—the chemical, the Alz primitive. It is from this conflict that they secrete a psychosomatic theory akin to Stahl and Hoffman, with its notion of organismic life force, a theory which attempts to transgress against and subsume, in the (I)nc., the cause of our affliction itself.

But wait a minute, one could say, what's really going on here, who's really being taken, being had? Gabriel has a problem with memory, and therefore with continuity. Isn't this it? It isn't that Gabriel *really* transformed like this, for such a thing is *impossible*. He *did* live a long life, and experience all of its experiences, but he just doesn't remember it this way, continuously. The experiences are there—he has little problem remembering New Year's Eve 1978 or his birthday in 1969—but he seems to feel as if he jumped out of those experiences, those places and times, into the present place and time without a memory of the betweenness. But without a memory of the betweenness it is always the present place and time. When one sleeps, when one moves

into and out of a world of sleep, one awakes to a new day, remembering the day before, and picking up where one left (or left) off, but here, not. Every day Gabriel and his people awake to a dreamscape, a *dreama* which we call a life without short term memory, but which to them has its own continuity, a *dreama* which humanity tries to direct. But what of their own subjectivity? Do we not mean to say they perceive things differently, that *to them* the world is this way or that, but *for us* it is different? Isn't relativity the key here? When the memory or the mnemonic faculty is altered, the experience and the logic of things within this experience is altered as well, right?

Here, in this phrasing, however, we see a key. What is going on, according to Gabriel, is that his memory and those of his kind is being "altered" and is "altered" by the colonial assault upon his people. This alteration, however, is not just change, but making different in all senses of alteration, in all senses of alterity. He wants to say that he and his own *are not* alter but rather same, but he knows they *are* altered, and alter, all the same. According to Gabriel, he and his people have found a way to get out from under and tame this dialectic, within a language, a way; no more 'From my perspective this and from your perspective that' but rather, 'From now on, within *dreama*, this *and* that; your perspective is dependent upon my perspective.' Like my friend saying he resembled my remark, Gabriel hopes to achieve a state—and I mean this in every sense—in which he and his people are no longer in relation to anything but rather, simply in relation, period. To do this, which is the key to his solution to save the existence of the world, he must *create an image of* a time, state or place (a history or story) before or beyond relation to this or that, an Edenic state of creation, which *draws from* and *reflects* the particular language of his people and what he thinks to be their "senile idealism" or materialism.

Maybe he did this with me when he told me of his quest to return to Homo Sapienity and I, however absurdly, came to associate him with another species.

When all is said and done, when all is related and told directly, the fatal mistake in Gabriel's *Journals* is in the way in which he names the cause, i.e. historically and practically. In R.G. Collingwood's first sense of cause, given in chapter two above, we see that which is caused as: "the free and deliberate act of a conscious and responsible agent," and, says Collingwood, "'causing' him to do it means affording him a motive for doing it." To Gabriel *the cause of* his predicament and his solution to it was that which afforded him—as a free and deliberate actor (but not *acting*), conscious and responsible—a motive for his predicament and solution. This affording motive was, in Gabriel's case, history and practicality itself. Gabriel took the history of the origins of the colonial struggle against his people as a power which needed to be overcome. In the *Journals* he decided to present the real history of the origins of this struggle as if it were fictive and, in doing so, present a form of immemorial history which would in some way be counter-hegemonic. He thought of his solution as one of applied science, but the practical and historical sides of his solution, and how he saw his predicament in the first place, overcame any such method of investigation and application.

Another way of putting this is that he let *the cause* make him into a conscious and responsible agent of his free acts, and let it afford him a means of action, while the *cause* of his and his people's *affliction* remained unexamined. It was in this way that he became inspired to do *something* with photographs and self-consciousness, *something* chemical or alchemical—*something* forever unknown but, I suspect, akin to love magic—and it was in this way that he and his people, that (his and their) primitively construed

nature itself, *in its failure, strengthened* their oppressive bonds. It is in this failure, exhibited by Gabriel and his people—in *understanding* it, *acknowledging* its guilt and *forgiving* it—that we begin to learn to name the cause, and undo it, from the standpoint of applied science.

If the truth be known, as I intend to make it later in this book, the most crucial of Gabriel's flaws were in his consideration, first, of the chemical itself and the dwelling of it in medical oracles, and then, second, of the strange and underlying propensity of Alz medicine (working in reciprocity with chemistry for hundreds of years) to reify relations, bonds, and to ignore the reality of *matter*, and especially its property of *mass*. In doing this he plays into the hands of a most subtle and alluring Pietist systematicity.