

Entries to Intimacy: Shared Solitude in Garth Greenwell's
What Belongs to You, Anne Carson's *Nox*, and Roni Horn's *Another*
Water (The River Thames, for Example)

by

Chaya Litvack

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Art
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Chaya Litvack 2019

Entries to Intimacy: Shared Solitude in Garth Greenwell's
What Belongs to You, Anne Carson's *Nox*, and Roni Horn's *Another*
Water (The River Thames, for Example)

Chaya Litvack

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Art
University of Toronto

2019

Abstract

This dissertation studies three books that unfold as inquiries into the possibility of being in relation. I argue that Garth Greenwell's *What Belongs to You*, Anne Carson's *Nox*, and Roni Horn's *Another Water (The River Thames, for Example)* attest to a form of togetherness that rests not on recognition or perception, but rather on the sense of a space that remains without relation. Readings these books in light of Michel Foucault's description of the archive, and Giorgio Agamben's theorization of thought, I show that this space marks the very place where relations emerge, a place, therefore, that exceeds both sight and thought. The books not only present modes of seeing, knowing, or thinking that turn towards this place, but also stage a sensuous engagement with the unseen, unsaid, or unthought. In each chapter, accordingly, I read scenes that both trace an experience that eludes the seeing or knowing subject, and bring the reader in touch with a space beyond relation. Drawing, in turn, on William Haver's notion of an erotics of thought, Roland Barthes' theory of photography, and Maurice Blanchot's theorization of the essential solitude, I delineate the ways in which these exemplary scenes affirm the impossibility of resolving the question of how to be with others. To engage this impossibility, the books suggest, is to open up relations to possibilities unforeseen.

Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the insight and support of my dissertation committee. I would first like to thank my supervisor, John Paul Ricco, for his guidance since the very early stages of this project. I am grateful to him for introducing me to a style of thought that has not only shaped my reading and writing, but also informed the manner in which I make sense of the time that I share with others. After our conversations, I am never so aware, nor so excited by all that I have yet to write, and all that I do not know, which, over the past few years, has proved to be the greatest source of encouragement. I would also like to thank Ann Komaromi for her intellectual generosity, and for guiding me ever closer to my primary texts, and Elizabeth Legge, for her perceptive readings, and unwavering assurance. As external examiners, Jacques Khalip and Brian Price both drew my attention to facets of my work that I had not yet perceived; I know that their feedback will continue to affect my thinking even beyond the conclusion of this project, for which I am deeply appreciative. I am thankful, in addition, for the funding that this research received from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the Department of Art at the University of Toronto; and for grants in the form of an Ontario Graduate Scholarship, and a School of Graduate Studies Conference Grant.

For supporting me through the years with wisdom, laughter, and care, I would also like to thank my old friends Adrienne Umeh and Sara Fuentes. I am fortunate, too, to have Matt Litvack as a brother; he continues to inspire me with his intelligence, quiet kindness, and generally cool composure. Finally, I would like to thank my mother, Donna Litvack, for her love, and my father, Richard Litvack, in whose memory I write.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: An Education in Erotic Sociality.....	25
Chapter 2: Being at a Loss	53
Chapter 3: On the Surface of Water.....	85
Epilogue: Shared Solitude.....	106
Figures.....	124
Bibliography	127

List of Figures

Figure 1: Unnumbered page from Anne Carson, *Nox*. New York, NY: New Directions, 2010.

Figure 2: Unnumbered page from Anne Carson, *Nox*. New York, NY: New Directions, 2010.

Figure 3: Unnumbered page from Anne Carson, *Nox*. New York, NY: New Directions, 2010.

Introduction

By “thought,” Giorgio Agamben writes, “we do not understand the individual exercise of an organ or psychic faculty but an experience, an *experimentum* that has as its object the potential character of life and human intelligence.”¹ Over the past few years, I have returned to Agamben’s theorization of thought many times. I have wondered how thought so conceived might inhabit various practices, and have asked how such an experience or experiment might be staged. I have questioned the manner in which potentiality itself might be figured, and have sought out examples of such figures in art and in writing of many genres. My thoughts, in this regard, have often circled back to Michel Foucault’s concept of the archive. Foucault, after all, describes the archive as a space of historical possibilities, or, more precisely, as an *a priori* that is historical insofar as it demarcates the conditions of the sayable, thinkable, or doable at any given moment. “The analysis of the archive,” he writes, “involves a privileged region: at once close to us, and different from our present existence, it is the border of time that surrounds our presence, which overhangs it, and which indicates it in its otherness; it is that which, outside ourselves, delimits us.”² The archive, as conceived by Foucault, lies outside the world as it is lived by or given to the seeing or knowing subject, for it marks the very place where the latter comes to emerge within the constraints of the possible; it hovers on the outskirts of the seen and the said, for it exercises its force in and as the set of rules that define the multiplicity of practices by which subjects and objects of knowledge come to appear and disappear, or form and transform in

¹ Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 210.

² Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1972), 130.

relation to others.³ As Foucault affirms, “It is not possible for us to describe our own archive, since it is from within these rules that we speak, since it is that which gives to what we can say – and to itself, the object of our discourse – its modes of appearance, its forms of existence and coexistence, its system of accumulation, historicity, and disappearance.”⁴ The archive exceeds description, for it is immanent in all that is said; it will have never been written, for far from coinciding with the historical record, or, as Foucault puts it, with “the *corpus* that passively collects the words that are spoken,” it corresponds to the form and force of a historical *a priori*.⁵ The archive, in this respect, might be characterized as the unthought place to which thought turns and returns as it grapples with, to return to Agamben, “the potential character of life and human intelligence.” When read alongside Foucault, Agamben’s conception of thought suggests that thinking takes place precisely as an experience of the archive, which is to say, as a mode of experimenting with, feeling out, or putting existence to the test of historical possibilities of speaking, acting, or seeing. Agamben intimates, in other words, that the archive will have only ever been experienced in and as a scene of undoing or erasure, a scene that traces nothing but the sensuous impact of any given possibility of being. To think, therefore, is to rub up against the limits of the thinkable; thinking takes places as the experience of a potential that will have never been fulfilled, but only ever sensed in and as the dissolution or destitution of the lived.⁶

³ Foucault, 48–49, 130.

⁴ Foucault, 130.

⁵ In this regard, the archive names what William Haver describes as “the historical situation of historicity,” a situation that “necessarily marks a limit for historical consciousness, the aporetic limit-experience that is at once the sole condition of possibility for every historicization but cannot itself be historicized or, indeed, conceptualized, except as the failure, the ruin, the crashing of conceptuality.” William Haver, *The Body of This Death: Historicity and Sociality in the Time of AIDS* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 53–54; Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 130.

⁶ With the word “dstitution,” I refer again to Haver, who writes, “The thought of historicity is the acknowledgement of the ultimate incapacity of historical consciousness to account for, or give meaning to, the utter destitution, the traumatic sensuous senselessness of what is in its materiality.” Haver, *The Body of This Death: Historicity and Sociality in the Time of AIDS*, 16.

This dissertation traces an attempt to delineate the aesthetics and erotics of practices that unfold as an experience of potential. In the following chapters, I study three books that dwell on the pleasures and possibilities that come to pass in the scene of relationality, which is to say, in the moment that marks the emergence of terms and relations. Following Foucault, I take this moment to map out a time that remains unlived, or rather, a space that remains in excess of every act or event. The experience of this space radically resists appropriation by the phenomenological or epistemological subject, for it attests to nothing but a fundamental receptivity to sensuous possibilities of being. In Garth Greenwell's novel *What Belongs to You*, this experience takes the form of practices as varied as looking, touching, writing, and walking, each of which draw the narrator's attention to the manner in which he comes to be moved by a mode of being in relation with the world, himself, or another.⁷ In Anne Carson's *Nox*, the time or space of the archive comes to be experienced in the act of translating; Carson figures the latter as a dark room in which a body forever feels for possibilities of speaking, none of which will have ever conveyed the translator's sense of the word or the being that she longs to bring to light.⁸ And in Roni Horn's *Another Water (The River Thames, for Example)*, thought becomes palpable in and as the act of watching or looking at water, or, more precisely, by means of a practice that traces the manner in which water rushes into and out of sight with every passing moment.⁹ Horn suggests that the surface of moving water and images of water alike brings the viewer in touch with an opacity that not only marks the place of water's existence, but also dissolves every measure by which the viewer might relate to herself, the world, or others. In *What Belongs to You*, *Nox*, and *Another Water*, scenes of being-together open onto the obscurity of a space without relation, a space that traces the place of the archive, which is to say, the *archē* or source

⁷ Garth Greenwell, *What Belongs to You* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016).

⁸ Anne Carson, *Nox* (New York, NY: New Directions, 2010).

⁹ Roni Horn, *Another Water (The River Thames, for Example)* (Gottingen, Germany: Steidl Publishers, 2000).

of relations.¹⁰ One of this dissertation's central claims is that these books propose a form of togetherness that rests on nothing but the sense of this space, that is, on nothing but an experience of the archive. This is an experience of undoing, disappearance or dissolution that registers not the impression of one thing or another, say, of any given body, image, or norm, but rather the destituent or unbecoming force borne by every thought.¹¹

To the extent that the readings that follow center on scenes that trace the experience of a potential that will have never been actualized, but only ever sensed in passing, I attend, throughout, to practices that touch upon, look towards, read, write, or otherwise engage the loss or withdrawal that founds relation; I attend to modes of being that attest to the sense of what Derrida describes as an an-archival force, a force, he asserts, that “leaves nothing of its own behind,” even as it opens up the possibility, or rather, constitutes the condition of all performativity, subjectivity, meaning, and history.¹² In this respect, this dissertation decidedly departs from scholarship that privileges the productive or constituent power of the performative

¹⁰ One might say that these are scenes in John Paul Ricco's sense of the word, for they each trace “an exposure and withdrawal that is at once prior to, and in the wake of, any instant that might be identified as an ‘event.’” I am also reminded, here, of Lauren Berlant's assertion that an object is “not an object but a scene, a setting for actions, a discontinuous space that appears navigable for moving around awkwardly, ambivalently, and incoherently, while making heuristic sense of what's becoming-event.” Berlant arguably orients herself more towards appearance than disappearance or withdrawal; however, for Greenwell's narrator, Carson, and Horn, bodies, words, and images similarly open onto a space in which “what's becoming-event,” or what's beginning to be, comes to be sensed. John Paul Ricco, *The Decision Between Us: Art and Ethics in the Time of Scenes* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 43; Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 99–100.

¹¹ I refer here to what Agamben calls “destituent potential,” as opposed to constitutive power. Agamben similarly describes the Derridean trace, of which thought is one figure (or which itself figures thought), as a potentiality “that experiences itself, a writing tablet that suffers not the impression of a form but the imprint of its own passivity, its own formlessness.” A writing tablet, here, corresponds to a potential to be written, that, as such, remains unwritten. I am also reminded, in this regard, of Jean-Luc Nancy's assertion that “the sensible is the element in which or as which the image effaces and withdraws itself. The Idea gets lost there – leaving its trace, no doubt, but not as the imprint of its form: as the tracing, the step, of its disappearance.” Bringing these two quotations together, one might say that sense takes place in the tracing of a passivity, a passivity that registers a punctual disappearance. Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 266–77; Giorgio Agamben, “Pardes,” in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 216; Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Vestige of Art,” in *The Muses*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 96. For a discussion of the Nancy quote cited above in relation to the question of the archive, see John Paul Ricco, “Pornographic Faith: Two Sources of Naked Sense at the Limits of Belief and Humiliation,” in *Porn Archives*, ed. Tim Dean, Steven Rusczycky, and David Squires (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 341.

¹² Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 11.

over that which remains out-of-work, or inoperative in every act or event.¹³ As I discuss in Chapter 1, Judith Butler's theory of performativity, for instance, forecloses the possibility of accessing the outside, or, as she calls it, "the constitutive outside," the time or place that marks the negative foundation, or absence-of-ground that sustains the question of the social.¹⁴ While Butler both acknowledges and calls for acknowledgement of the opacity that simultaneously founds and ruptures relation, she locates political potentiality in the transformative power of performance, that is, in the performative iteration or re-articulation of the norms or terms of recognition that delimit the sphere of the possible, and thus define what counts as human.¹⁵ Rather than trace strategies to engage or expose the unsaid in the spoken, or the unseen in the viewed, Butler endorses practices that look towards the limits of the legible or the intelligible, only to recuperate the unthought, the impersonal, or the un-lived in the name of the human, which is to say, only to expand the field of the human.¹⁶ In this regard, queer theory informed by Butler's relentlessly productive and expansionist approach to the question of the social

¹³ Invoking Derrida, Butler, and Foucault, Sedgwick notes that post-structuralist theory hinges, in part, on the productive slant of performative utterances. As Sedgwick goes on to show in her theorization of what she calls "peri-performative utterances," however, the anti-essentialist conception of language in general as constitutively performative tends to occlude forms of utterances that felicitously defer, displace, or deflect the seemingly tyrannical efficacy of Austinian speech acts. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 5–6.

¹⁴ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), xiii.

¹⁵ It is perhaps telling that Butler herself describes the subject – the I – as "always recuperating, reconstructing, and [...] left to fictionalize and fabulate origins I cannot know." Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005), 20–22, 38–39, 42–43; Judith Butler, "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy," in *Undoing Gender* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 27–31.

¹⁶ I am reminded, in this regard, of Colebrook and Weinstein's claim that "modes of celebrating becoming, potentiality, and the dynamism of the singularity of a life of which humans are an inessential component [...] will contribute to the literal end of man and do more to avoid, rather than confront, the posthuman sensibility that has always situated the human species apart from its determined and human-all-too-human being," a sensibility that rests on the simple fact that, as they write, "there will be a time after the human." Elsewhere, Colebrook cites Butler's work as but one example of the ways in which theory has turned away from the inhuman and increasingly towards life. She writes, "Whereas theory might be approached beginning from estrangement and distance, considering a world that is not ourselves and a force that cannot be returned to the human, theory is moving precisely in the opposite direction to being nothing more than the expression of praxis, nothing more than relations of recognition." Jami Weinstein and Claire Colebrook, "Postscript on the Posthuman," in *Posthumous Life: Theorizing Beyond the Posthuman*, ed. Jami Weinstein and Claire Colebrook (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2017), xviii; Claire Colebrook, "Extinct Theory," in *Death of the PostHuman: Essays on Extinction, Vol. 1* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2014), 36–37; Claire Colebrook, "How Queer Can You Go?," in *Sex after Life: Essays on Extinction, Vol. 2* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2014), 192.

manifests, to quote Anne-Lise François, “the normative bias in favor of the demonstrable, dramatic development and realization of human powers characteristic of, but not limited to, the capitalist investment in value and work and the Enlightenment allegiance to rationalism and unbounded progress.”¹⁷ Such a bias similarly pervades the scholarly discourse on the archive, which, specifically within the context of art history and performance studies, consistently glosses over the unbecoming force borne by the archive in favor of affirming the potentializing power of a performative to come.¹⁸ As in Hal Foster’s analysis of what he calls “an archival impulse” in contemporary art, the archive is most often valued as the place from which to re-articulate the possible or present new orders for relating to the past, rather than the space in which to sense an evacuation of historical possibilities or experience the dissolution of the given.¹⁹ Rebecca

¹⁷ As François elaborates elsewhere, “the normative presumption favoring the articulation of human potential and implicitly conflating ‘enjoyment’ with articulation, although it may coincide historically with a corresponding pressure to ‘develop’ (and exhaust) natural resources, is not simply historically linked to the productionist, colonizing, and instrumental ethos of modern Western capitalism. It continues to dominate our cultural landscape and critical horizons, often determining the meliorist – whether recuperative or demystifying – bent of much current scholarship in the humanities and, more specifically, facilitating the problematic slippage that Foucault’s work warns us against from a hard-won *right* to speak and/or enjoy to a compulsive *duty* to speak, take possession of, and enjoy.” Anne-Lise François, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), xvi, 22.

¹⁸ As Derrida has shown, the iterative affirmation of the future to come – a future that, in its radical indeterminacy, is irreducible to any future present – is inseparable from the anarchival force of the death drive, or rather, the anarchival force that is the death drive: “If repetition is [...] inscribed at the heart of the future to come, one must also import there, *in the same stroke*, the death drive, the violence of forgetting, *superrepression* (suppression and repression), the archive, in short, the possibility of putting to death the very thing, whatever its name, which *carries the law in its tradition*: the archon of the archive, the table, *what* carries the table and *who* carries the table, the subjectile, the substrate, and the subject of the law.” Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 1996, 79.

¹⁹ Accordingly, Foster welcomes what he perceives as a “desire to turn belatedness into becomingness, to recoup failed visions in art, literature, philosophy, and everyday life into possible scenarios of alternative kinds of social relations, to transform the no-place of the archive into the no-place of a utopia.” This dissertation studies practices, in contrast, that refuse to make something of the no-place of the archive – practices that take that no-place as the entry to a form of intimacy that rests on a potential that remains withdrawn. See Hal Foster, “An Archival Impulse,” *October* 110 (2004): 22. On the use of the archive as an artistic medium, or as a means to reflect on the historical condition, see also Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (New York, NY: International Center of Photography, 2008); Ingrid Schaffner and Matthias Winzen, eds., *Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing, and Archiving in Art* (Munich, Germany: Prestel-Verlag, 1998); Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008). Spieker concludes his book, which argues for a historical link between the use of archival records in contemporary artistic practice and what he reads as the Dadaist and Surrealist challenge to the bureaucracy of the nineteenth-century archive, with a few words on Thomas Demand’s photograph *Archive* (1995). Demand’s photograph pictures a reconstruction of German filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl’s personal archive; however, the boxes that once carried the contents of that archive appear entirely empty, and stripped of any identifying marks. Here we have the image of an archive that resolutely resists the work of meaning or translation, an archive from

Schneider's recent theorization of performance as an archive, in this regard, is a case in point, for, not unlike Butler, Schneider enlists the originary erasure that grounds every act in the production and reproduction of knowledge. For Schneider, performance "remains, but remains differently or *in difference*"; performance remains, she argues, in and as "the performative trace," which marks the differential repetition of past performances and normative gestures alike.²⁰ Schneider submits that the body thus appears as the record or the document of a history unmoored from any one source, a history that persists only insofar as performance iteratively traces its remains.²¹ In its essential finitude and historicity, performance bears the potential to stage the loss that grounds the lived, or, as Peggy Phelan writes, to expose "not the meaning but the value of what cannot be reproduced or seen (again)."²² Schneider, however, persists in taking performance as a mode of historical knowledge; even as she affirms the impossibility of ever recuperating lost origins, she contends that history is lived, or, more precisely, lived differently yet again with every act or event.²³

which all traces of the human seem to have been effaced. My readings of *Nox* and *Another Water*, in particular, consider what takes place in the encounter with similar images, and inquire into the experience of similar scenes. See Roxana Marcoci, *Thomas Demand* (New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 2005).

²⁰ Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 102.

²¹ Schneider claims that "the notion of performance as disappearance crosses chiasmically with ritual – ritual, in which, through performance we are asked, again, to (re)found ourselves – to find ourselves in repetition." I would add, as a corollary and a corrective, that we, among others, will have also always found ourselves unfounded by the passing of every moment. Schneider, 105.

²² Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 152.

²³ Schneider's work informs not only performative approaches to the archive or archiving, but also a growing body of literature on the afterlife of history via performance. Most recently, for instance, a special issue of the journal *Parallax* centered on the theme "Performative Afterlife." While the notion of afterlife bears the potential to turn attention towards the unfinishedness of things in their resistance to the given or the lived, the editors of the issue draw on Benjamin's notion of *Nachleben* to emphasize the infinite translatability, or "transformative survival" of original works. Side-stepping that which, in any given source, will have always remained unrealized, untranslatable, and incomplete, they put the afterlife of things to work in the service of a humanist aesthetics. Jacques Khalip, in contrast, takes the unfinishedness of things to signal a radical indifference to the human; in their singularity, he argues, unfinished things are characterized by "lastness," which "stresses the repeatability or recoil of an end that is neither negative nor a new beginning." Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 102–4; Swen Steinhauser and Neil Maconald, "Introduction: Performative Afterlife," *Parallax* 24, no. 1 (2018): 1–10; Jacques Khalip, *Last Things: Disastrous Form from Kant to Hajar* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2018), 7. Schneider's influence on

This dissertation, in contrast, studies practices that tend towards the unlived, the singular, and the disappeared. *What Belongs to You*, *Nox*, and *Another Water*, I argue, trace non-instrumental, non-productive modes of seeing, knowing, writing, and thinking. In every instance, these modes of being-in-relation are characterized by a rapt, intransigent attentiveness to the sensuous surface of bodies, language, or images. Greenwell's narrator, for example, comes to be as entranced by the touch or the scent of others' skin, as by the sight of a fly on a bus, a fly whose every fine, subtle movement he carefully observes. Similarly, language captivates Carson, who appears to ceaselessly feel out translations for every word in a Latin poem, as if translating entailed rolling around the stuff of language in the palm of one's hand. Finally, as I suggested above, the sight of both water and images of water rivet Horn to the passing of every moment, or rather, to the passing sense of water as it surfaces, or spirals out of view. Whether touching, translating, or looking, Greenwell's narrator, Carson, and Horn, I argue, each appear to engage and withdraw from the world at once, as though moved by perception to linger, unthinkingly, in the place, or non-relational space where sense first unfolds; respectively fascinated by or fixated on the surface of bodies, words, and water, they each come to attest to a mode of being with the world without the coercions of relation, which is to say, without coercing others into being anything but *how* – not what – they appear in passing, and without being coerced in turn. In this regard, the practices that I study in this dissertation bear a certain resemblance to what Rei Terada calls looking away, a technique, or, as she puts it, a “phenomenophilic” mode of seeing in which “the most transient perceptual objects come to be loved because only they seem capable of noncoercive relation.”²⁴ Looking away, as Terada describes it, might involve glancing at the play

art historical and performance studies discourse is particularly apparent in Gunhild Borggreen and Rune Gade, eds., *Performing Archives, Archives of Performance* (Copenhagen, Denmark: Museum Tusculanum, 2013).

²⁴ Rei Terada, *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction, Kant to Adorno* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 4.

of light on a wall, tilting the head so as to see something sidelong, or otherwise modifying perception, say, with the use of a mirror or a magnifying glass.²⁵ Drawing on Kantian terminology, Terada argues that looking away, in all instances, involves re-framing *Erscheinung* as *Schein*, which is to say, re-casting appearance, which conforms to perceptual norms by necessity, as “mere appearance.”²⁶ The latter, she explains, can register either as an errant perception – “a wayward experience that really is an epistemological dead end,” to quote Terada – or as a reflexive form of appearance, or rather, “the appearance of appearance.” Whether indulging in mere appearance permits an awareness of illusory phenomena or provokes an attentiveness to appearance as it appears, however, it necessarily gives rise to perceptions too flimsy to exercise the exigency of fact, and too fleeting to ever be shared, never mind constitute a new norm.²⁷ Terada shows that looking away thus offers a temporary reprieve from the seemingly inexorable pressure to affirm or submit to the world as it is given, or, to put it in deconstructive terms, to the world as it always already appears to the seeing or knowing subject.²⁸ The technique, she goes on to argue, therefore implies a resistance to or dissatisfaction with the claim of the given, a discomfort or unease that the phenomenophile either underplays or bears with guilt for seeming so impracticable, pointless, and asocial.²⁹ Terada insists, however, that the phenomenophilic tendency to withdraw from the social and take refuge in the singularity of mere appearance is significant in and of itself; to acknowledge, as she puts it, “the right of dissatisfaction with the given world,” and, correlatively, the right to desist from accepting what

²⁵ Looking away thus involves devising a means, to quote Terada, “to adjust one’s forms of contact with the world,” or “to vary the terms of experience.” She cites Coleridge’s experimentation with optical illusions and ephemeral visions, or what he called “spectra,” as an exemplary form of such perceptual play. She writes, “Coleridge’s cultivation of spatial distortion and hyperintensity through ‘voluntary production’ is both a suspensive pleasure and a redramatization of perception as an epistemological problem.” Terada, 43–49.

²⁶ Looking away, in this regard, “expresses resistance against coercion by fact perception where *Erscheinung* takes on the authority of the given.” Terada, 18–19, 97.

²⁷ Terada, 2–3, 19–23, 162–63.

²⁸ Terada, 3, 8.

²⁹ Terada, 17–18, 23–24.

always already appears to be the case, would be “to trouble the waters of sexual, epistemological, and political acceptance of the given as such.”³⁰

In their enthrallment to surface in all of its manifold modalities, Greenwell’s narrator, Carson, and Horn might be said to practice forms of staring rather than looking away; rather than squinting or looking aslant at the world, they lavish attention on the sensuous facet of appearance, as though they were incapable of doing anything but gape, wide-eyed and dumb, at the world as it presents itself in passing, or rather, capable only of giving themselves over to the sense of being with any given body, image, word. As the following chapters show, however, staring converges with looking away insofar as it paradoxically permits a turning away from the world, despite, or rather, precisely because of its intensity. As T.J. Clark discovers when, over the course of several months, he repeatedly returns his gaze to Poussin’s paintings *Landscape with a Calm* and *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake*, the stare, like the phenomenophile’s look away, discloses an irreducible distance between perception and discourse, thus alleviating the pressure that the latter, with its normative force, exerts on the former.³¹ Perhaps, then, it would be more accurate to say that *What Belongs to You*, *Nox*, and *Another Water* suggest that staring, whether haptic, verbal, or visual, itself constitutes a form of looking away; as a heightened mode of attention and a form of sensory experimentation, staring similarly offers the means to linger or take respite in a space that remains outside whatever the subject might make

³⁰ Terada, 26, 28–34.

³¹ Touching upon the incommensurability, or infinite relation between the visual and the verbal, Clark writes of the “imperative to point to the real boundaries between seeing and speaking, or sentence and visual configuration. And (the) imperative to keep alive a notion of a kind of visibility that truly establishes itself *at the edge of the verbal* – never wholly apart from it, that is, never out of discourse’s clutches, but able and willing to exploit the difference between a sign and a pose, say, or a syntactical structure and a physical (visual, material) interval [...] I look back to the drape of the snake over its victim’s body, or the running man’s reflection in the stream, as my instances of what images are like when they truly interfere with preconceptions, and generate new frameworks (or at least, new possibilities) of understanding.” I would add that language, too, can open up a space or play at the edge of discourse, as Clark’s “experiment in art writing” itself suggests. T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 121–23, 175–77.

of it, a space that Terada describes as “the space before the acceptance of any perceived fact,” and that I have identified as the place of the archive.³² In the Epilogue, I argue that Greenwell’s narrator, Carson, and Horn express varying degrees of ambivalence with respect to this imperceptible place, even as they each intimate a certain dissatisfaction with the demands of visibility, or with the terms that govern the legible and intelligible; in many instances, though, as we will see, not all, the scenes of relation that I study in this dissertation therefore validate Terada’s claim that the phenomenophile feels, as she puts it, no right “to mind” the given.³³ At the same time, however, these scenes gesture towards a sociality that rests not on relations of recognition, which, as such, would require at least a minimal endorsement of this or that fact or factual condition, but rather on the sense of singular, solitary perceptions; my readings show that the inappropriable, radically private, and ephemeral perceptions in which the phenomenophile finds refuge from the world in fact constitute the abyssal ground of an intimacy beyond relation.³⁴ In other words, *What Belongs to You*, *Nox*, and *Another Water* map out an intimacy that derives its form and force precisely from a resistance to the given, or rather, lest the word “resistance” seem too weighty, from practices that orient themselves towards no other end than the place where bodies come to appear, relations come undone, and sensuous possibilities come to pass once more. Terada writes that the phenomenophile’s desire “to withdraw from what it perceives is worthy of respect, and this desire does not need to be linked to any future possibility

³² Notably, Terada locates this space “on the periphery of the aesthetic,” or rather, “on the edges of the artwork and outside it.” As I discuss in Chapters 2 and 3, *Nox* and *Another Water*, in particular, draw attention to the fact that sense takes place on the periphery or the fringes of the seen and the said. Terada, *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction, Kant to Adorno*, 5–8.

³³ I am struck by Terada’s use of the word minding to describe dissatisfaction, for it suggests a turn, or a movement away from the world that comes to be generative of “mind,” where mind refers not to the place of subjective interiority, but rather to a place where one senses, incoherently, the contours of a thing that can not exist on the world’s terms. Minding, in other words, seems to be the inverse of worlding, and, in this respect, might approach Agamben’s understanding of thought as an experience. Terada, 23–24, 33.

³⁴ I refer here to Marie-Eve Morin’s reading of “abyssal intimacy” in the work of Jean-Luc Nancy. Marie-Eve Morin, “How Do We Live Here?: Abyssal Intimacies in Jean-Luc Nancy’s *La Vile Au Loin*,” *Parrhesia*, no. 25 (2016): 110–28.

(for genuine sociality, critical perspicuity, etc.)”; the exemplary scenes that I read in this thesis similarly suggest that the intimacy that comes to be sensed in and as the time or space of the archive, or rather, in and as an experience of potential, is, in and of itself, more than enough, however momentary it may be, or long it may last.³⁵

So, to Terada’s suggestion that the pleasures of looking away partially lie in the fact that singular perceptions elude the normative force that would permit others to partake in them, I would add that modes of seeing, touching, or speaking that move in response to such perceptions in fact attest to the intimacy of a space without relation. As I discuss in the Epilogue, *What Belongs to You*, *Nox* and *Another Water* suggest that the experience of this space corresponds to an experience of solitude that paradoxically signals one’s exposure to and intimacy with the world; the experience of the archive, in other words, simultaneously registers the sense of any given scene of relation, and the solitary experience of being without others. On exemplary occasions, I argue, Greenwell’s narrator, Carson, and Horn impossibly come to share their solitude with others upon respectively coming into contact with a body or a being that appears withdrawn, and that therefore resists translation, interpretation, or appropriation. To share one’s solitude, I show, is to attest to the sense of a common opacity, of an impossibility of thinking that traces the sensuous impact of being-in-relation; it is to move, freely, in response to the sense of a potential that will have never passed into an act, the sense of the destituent force that essentially distances each being from every other. The sociality that emerges in scenes of shared solitude puts pressure on the forms of relation endorsed by theorists of relational aesthetics and relational antagonism alike; whereas the former valorize works that forge “forms of conviviality” via modes of participation or inter-subjective exchange, and the latter privilege art that exposes or sustains “relations of conflict” on the grounds that antagonism lies at the heart of the political,

³⁵ Terada, *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction, Kant to Adorno*, 29.

this dissertation traces the intimacy that arises when bodies come together to touch upon a non-relational, unliveable place.³⁶ Sharing solitude, we will see, involves sensing, or tracing the sense of a potential that releases beings from the demand to present oneself, the world, or others in light of any relation at all.

*

What Belongs to You, *Nox*, and *Another Water* neither belong to the same genre, nor take the same form, nor conform to the criteria of any one discipline; as the chapters in this dissertation progress, I move from a work composed entirely of words, to a mass-produced replica of a scrapbook, to a book near-filled with glossy photographs of water. I chose to study dissimilar objects precisely in order to inquire into the manner in which various forms of expression open onto the experience of the archive, or rather, onto the experience of potential. I engage the formal and material specificity of each book precisely in order to examine the singular manner in which each one responds to the question of how to look towards, move with, or simply be with what remains unseen, unsaid, or unthought. It is also worth noting, in relation to my selection of objects, that the books themselves either explicitly trace, or implicitly affirm a series of improbable, or incongruous juxtapositions. In Greenwell's novel, for instance, the narrator draws an analogy between the activity of watching a fly, and the practice of love; in *Nox*, Latin-English dictionary entries appear beside scraps of old letters, childhood recollections, and reflections on death and history; and in *Another Water*, the footnotes appear unmoored from the photographs that make up the main body of text, such that the correspondence between the notes and the images remains uncertain, no longer or not yet secured. To varying degrees, these books posit, as Leo Bersani writes of Jean-Luc Godard's film *Passion*, "incongruous couplings," each of which

³⁶ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Paris, France: Les presses du réel, 2002), 16; Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October*, no. 110 (2004): 65–67.

attests to “a propensity of the mind to produce epistemologically useless connections.” Bersani continues: “It is as if we were at the moment of similitudes just emerging – unfinished, unrealized.”³⁷ Incongruous couplings, Bersani suggests, not only make the moment that marks the source of relations palpable, but also suspend relations at the point of their emergence, at the point at which they “merely [...] begin to be.”³⁸ As much as this dissertation draws out connections and correspondences between Greenwell, Carson, and Horn’s respective books, I would echo Bersani in emphasizing that these relations attest to the manner in which dissimilar objects, when set side-by-side, open onto a field of unfinished or unrealized possibilities, possibilities that unsettle both the works themselves, and the disciplinary frameworks through which they each might be studied.³⁹

In the first chapter, I study *What Belongs to You* in order to inquire into what happens or comes to pass in the time or space that marks the source, or originary force of relationality. Drawing on William Haver’s notion of erotic sociality, and John Paul Ricco’s theorization of the common as a space of separation, I read a series of scenes in Greenwell’s novel in order to outline a form of intimacy that arises in and as a scene of non-relation, and that thereby keeps the question of how to be with others open.⁴⁰ The narrator, I show, practices such an intimacy on the occasions when he constitutes himself in relation to a moment that exceeds relation, a moment that registers the passing sense of seeing, touching, embracing, contemplating, or simply being-with others. This moment, I show, traces a space of affection, which is to say, the space where

³⁷ Leo Bersani, *Thoughts and Things* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 81.

³⁸ Bersani, 82.

³⁹ In *Economy of the Unlost*, Carson describes her reasons for studying Paul Celan alongside Simonides in similar terms. Celan and Simonides, she writes, “keep each other from settling. Moving and not settling, they are side by side in a conversation and yet no conversation takes place. Face to face, yet they do not know another, did not live in the same era, never spoke the same language. With and against, aligned and adverse, each is placed like a surface on which the other may come into focus.” Anne Carson, *Economy of the Unlost* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), viii.

⁴⁰ See Haver, *The Body of This Death: Historicity and Sociality in the Time of AIDS*; Ricco, *The Decision Between Us: Art and Ethics in the Time of Scenes*.

bodies comes to be affected or undone upon coming into contact with others. In my reading, I concentrate on select episodes in the novel, most of which contribute minimally, if at all, to the narrative per se.⁴¹ Indeed, as I discuss at greater length in the Epilogue, the narrator most forcefully attests to the possibility of a sociality founded on nothing but a common undoing when he leaves his story behind in favor of losing himself in the sensuous impact of any given scene of relation. When I return to these themes in the Epilogue, we will see that on several occasions, even he betrays a desire to secure a relation to himself or to others.

Nox and *Another Water* similarly affirm the possibility of experiencing a time or a space that remains without relation, outside the scope of the seeing or speaking subject. In Chapter 2, I show that Carson figures this space as a room in which bodies come to sense a common incapacity to see or to speak, a muteness that she describes as a “fundamental opacity of human being.”⁴² A facsimile of a scrapbook composed by Carson in the wake of her brother’s passing, *Nox* delineates the contours of this space on the level of form and content alike. I study Carson’s practice, as traced by the language and images in *Nox*, to argue that translating, historical inquiry, and mourning equally open onto an infinite scene or space of relation. Carson’s sense of the untranslatable, which is to say, of an impossibility of seeing or speaking, essentially provokes her to reach, endlessly, for fragments of history, memory, and meaning, none of which will have ever released her from the muteness she bears. I show, moreover, that Carson makes use of

⁴¹ Insofar as these episodes find the narrator’s attention arrested by the sight, scent, or feel of a body, and thus bring the narrative to a standstill, they might each be characterized as a *tableau*, which Barthes, referring to Diderot’s aesthetics, defines as “a pure cut-out segment with clearly defined edges, irreversible and incorruptible; everything that surrounds it is banished into nothingness, remains unnamed, while everything that it admits within its field is promoted into essence, into light, into view.” Michael Fried’s analysis of the *tableau* is also pertinent here, for, as I argue in the Epilogue, Greenwell’s narrator, not unlike Fried’s beholder, at once senses his distance, or even absence from, and complete absorption by whatever he comes to perceive. Roland Barthes, “Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,” in *Image - Music - Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1977), 70–71; Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 92–96.

⁴² Carson, *Nox*, section 1.3.

language and images to write, or performatively present the muteness that she and her brother share. Her practice, in this respect, breaks with the dialectic of memory and forgetting that Rosalind Krauss associates with mediality.⁴³ If *Nox*, to quote Krauss, “figures forth” its “technical support,” that is, a support defined by a set of rules rather than any given substance, then it shows that support to consist of nothing but the depletion or evacuation of historical possibilities.⁴⁴ Contra Krauss, Carson presents memory work as a practice that necessarily involves a non-dialectical, non-relational relation to a potential that resists both forgetting and recollection.

If Carson, in *Nox*, turns towards the surface of language and traces of the past to feel, forever, for a way out of a space of obscurity and unknowing, then Horn, in *Another Water*, attends to the surface of water precisely in order to move towards an opacity that eludes the reach of sight and thought. In Chapter 3, I build on my study of Greenwell’s novel by considering the erotics of scenes of non-relation as presented in *Another Water*. Horn’s book is primarily composed of photographs of the surface of the River Thames, and, streaming beneath these images, a sequence of 832 footnotes. I read these footnotes alongside the photographs to show that the book traces a mode of seeing or thinking that engages the imperceptible place where terms and relations emerge. Horn suggests, I argue, that the opacity of water lies in the movement by which the substance comes to appear, or rather, in the moment in which it comes to be seen or known. This moment both registers the passing sense of a body as it rushes into or out of view, and, correlatively, maps out the break that founds relation, or rather, to quote Peggy Phelan, exposes “the broken symmetry between the self and the other.”⁴⁵ For Phelan, this break registers both the impossibility of seeing oneself or others without levelling the seen to the terms

⁴³ Rosalind E. Krauss, *Under Blue Cup* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

⁴⁴ Krauss, 4–19.

⁴⁵ Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, 27.

of the same, and the potential to see in light of that impossibility, which is to say, to see in a manner that attends to the “nonvisible, rhetorically unmarked aspects of identity,” aspects that will have never been given to be seen or said.⁴⁶ *Another Water* not only dramatizes this possibility, but also suggests that the encounter with the “unmarked” in fact dissolves identities, which disappear into the obscurity of the place where sensuous possibilities unfold.

In *What Belongs to You*, the narrator’s comportment affirms the possibility of a reading that would attend to the shifting dynamics of any scene of relation, or rather, to the affective impact of each passing moment. *Nox* and *Another Water*, on the other hand, script a reading that replicates the practices by which each writer comes to sense the conditions of the legible, the visible, and the intelligible; both books, I show, bring the reader in contact with an impossibility of seeing or speaking. While I draw on various theoretical and philosophical sources to supplement my discussion of each book, I have therefore attempted, throughout Chapters 2 and 3, to model my reading off of the mode of inquiry or form of attention traced by the books themselves. My reading of *Nox*, in this regard, traces the manner in which the surface of the book itself offers the means to sense the muteness that Carson experiences both in the act of translating, and at the thought of her brother. Likewise, my reading of *Another Water* considers how the footnotes and the images alike orient the reader towards, as Horn puts it, the “blackness” of water, the opacity that marks the source or scene of relationality. Following Carson’s and Horn’s lead, I attend, in both instances, to what Agamben describes as “the moment of a

⁴⁶ In this regard, Phelan calls for “seeing the hollow blindness of our own eyes,” and “a greater willingness to accept the impotency of the inward gaze.” Phelan’s emphasis on the possibilities that come from an essential impossibility brings to mind Ricco’s conceptualization of “a disappeared aesthetics,” which, he writes, “is precisely that aesthetics which cannot visualize, and which persistently and defiantly approaches its potentiality to not visualize, to forget, to be rendered blind [...] One might say that a disappeared aesthetics is not the impossibility of being-able-to, but the ‘possibility of being-able-no-longer-to’ visualize.” Phelan, 26; John Paul Ricco, *The Logic of the Lure* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 41–42.

phenomenon's arising."⁴⁷ The moment of arising corresponds not to a past time or date, but rather to the present emergence of phenomena, that is, to the now passing moment that marks the constitution of subjects and objects of discourse; it embodies not an origin that might be named in one history or another, but rather the force that opens up the very possibility of knowledge.⁴⁸ The moment of arising thus discloses the present as the limit of experience, or, to quote Agamben, as "what remains non-lived in every life," or "unexperienced in every experience."⁴⁹ Within the context of *Nox* or *Another Water*, this moment might be said to unfold in and as the room where one's body feels for possibilities of meaning, or to come to pass just as water rushes into or out of view. By tracing this unlived moment along with Carson and Horn, I aim to show that the reader and the writer come to find common ground with innumerable others in a time or space that remains unlived, before or beyond the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable.

In the Epilogue, I elaborate further upon the form of togetherness that arises in the scene or space that readers come to share with each writer. I consider Carson's and Horn's respective figures for opacity alongside Maurice Blanchot's notion of "the essential solitude" to show that *Nox* and *Another Water* both attest to an intimacy that takes place between singular beings.

Returning to select scenes from my earlier discussion of *What Belongs to You*, I go on to trace the manner in which Greenwell's novel similarly affirms a correspondence between solitude and

⁴⁷ Agamben draws this term from Foucault's essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in which Foucault translates Nietzsche's word *Entstehung* as "emergence, the moment of arising." Giorgio Agamben, "Philosophical Archaeology," in *The Signature of All Things: On Method* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2009), 82–84, 89.

⁴⁸ Agamben identifies archaeology, specifically, as the method or mode of historical inquiry that takes this moment as its object. "Provisionally," he writes, "we may call 'archaeology' that practice which in any historical investigation has to do not with origins but with the moment of a phenomenon's arising and must therefore engage anew the sources and tradition." He goes on to suggest that a practice that would "engage anew the sources and traditions" would interrogate the practices, material techniques, and conventions that govern the production and reproduction of meaning so as to trace the moment in which any given thing comes to be seen or known. While I am hesitant to put a name to Carson and Horn's respective forms of questioning, as presented in *Nox* and *Another Water*, they both arguably proceed along similar lines: Carson in her practice of translation, which, as I discuss in Chapter 2, breaks down every word in a Latin elegy into manifold events of meaning, and Horn by inquiring into the manner in which water appears in photographic, literary, cinematic, and liquid form. Agamben, 84, 89.

⁴⁹ Agamben, 99–103.

sociality. To conclude, I map out a sense of solitude that bespeaks an essential receptivity to others, rather than the mastery or exclusion of a self-possessed subject. In the experience of being without others, I affirm, one comes to sense the depth of a closeness beyond relation.

*

To my knowledge, Garth Greenwell's work has not yet received any scholarly attention. That being said, my reading of *What Belongs to You*, Greenwell's first novel, was greatly informed by Adam Mars-Jones' review in the *London Review of Books*.⁵⁰ Mars-Jones characterizes Greenwell's initial portrayal of the narrator as "a sustained exercise in the literary modelling of negative space." The narrator, Mars-Jones notes, appears without a past throughout the first section of the book, or rather, appears to have a past only insofar as it is palpable in the present, or "deducible from the effect of its drag on the present."⁵¹ For Mars-Jones, the novel loses its force once the narrator begins to divulge his life story, for that story, he claims, is stitched together by a series of primal scenes, episode after episode positing yet another source for the narrator's longings and alienation. In the Epilogue, I touch on the narrator's occasional tendency to turn towards the past in search of a cause for his present behavior. For the most part, however, I have side-stepped these scenes, each of which appear to confirm the narrator's subjection to an originary exclusion or loss, in favor of focusing on episodes or moments that affirm the intimacy to be found in a scene of mutual withdrawal. In so doing, I aim to draw out those moments when "negative space," to quote Mars-Jones, offers itself to be sensed as such. In my reading, however, no amount of recollecting or recounting will have ever depleted this space

⁵⁰ Adam Mars-Jones, "The Unpronounceable," *London Review of Books*, April 2016.

⁵¹ Mars-Jones.

of its force; it exposes, as Carson writes of her brother's muteness, an "overtakelessness" that remains in excess of facts, and thus forever casts its shadow on the record of the past.⁵²

In addition to *What Belongs to You*, Greenwell has written essays on the intimacies or, as he describes it, the poetry of cruising.⁵³ As described in these essays, his own experience of cruising suggests a sensibility akin to that of the narrator in his novel. "Often," Greenwell writes, "wandering a new city, pacing its promising streets, I have a peculiar sensation of heightened sensitivity. Watching for I'm not sure what signal, attentive in all directions, I feel myself tense and receptive, like a bell waiting to be struck."⁵⁴ In my discussion of Greenwell's novel, we will see that these words might have very well been spoken by his narrator, whose walks through the streets of Mladost and Varna are charged with a similar attentiveness. Despite the resemblances between the author and his narrator, however, I have chosen to take the narrator's words on their own terms, or rather, to approach the narrator as a being apart from Greenwell himself; rather than reading Greenwell's writing to explore his relation to a world of his invention, I read the narrator's mode of relating to himself and others so as to inquire into the experience of a space without relation.

In contrast to Greenwell, Anne Carson and Roni Horn both have expansive bodies of work and extensive bibliographies. While a scholarly monograph has yet to be published on Carson's work, her books, poetry, translations, essays, and fiction have all been the subject of much scholarship over the past decade or so.⁵⁵ As befits Carson's writing, which defies both

⁵² Carson, *Nox*, section 1.3.

⁵³ See Garth Greenwell, "On Beauty and Distance," *Fourth Genre: Explorations in Nonfiction* 13, no. 2 (2011): 47–64; Garth Greenwell, "How I Fell In Love With the Beautiful Art of Cruising," *Buzzfeed*, April 4, 2016, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/garthgreenwell/how-i-fell-in-love-with-the-beautiful-art-of-cruising>.

⁵⁴ Greenwell, "On Beauty and Distance," 59–60.

⁵⁵ Carson's first book, *Eros the Bittersweet*, was published in 1986, but it seems as if it took some time for her writing to catch on in an academic context. A number of reflections on and responses to Carson's work have recently been collected in Joshua Marie Wilkinson, ed., *Anne Carson: Ecstatic Lyre* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

generic and disciplinary classification, the scholarly literature on her work addresses subjects as diverse as the concept of the sublime, the technique of *ekphrasis*, the representation of gender, and the poetics of translation, to name but a few.⁵⁶ The scholarship on *Nox*, however, is relatively scarce, perhaps by virtue of its 2010 publication date. Primarily, scholars have centered on questions of form, and approached the latter from the perspective of Media Studies or Book History.⁵⁷ Others have framed the book in disparate ways: Joan Fleming calls *Nox* a work of “therapeutic biography,” that is, a means to continually work through the past in the service of understanding; and Jocelyn Parr describes it as a “study in shame,” where shame registers an affect apart or unhinged from the phenomenological self.⁵⁸ Among these takes, my reading of *Nox* most resonates with Jill Marsden’s, for she too considers the manner in which the book offers the sense of a certain opacity.⁵⁹ In *Nox*, Marsden argues, the radical opacity of a Blanchotian Night “functions as a site of something elemental, the place from which all

⁵⁶ See, for instance, Dan Disney, “Sublime Disembodiment? Self-as-Other in Anne Carson’s *Decreation*,” *Orbis Litterarum* 65, no. 1 (2012): 25–38; Alessia Ricciardi, “Becoming Women: From Antonioni to Anne Carson and Cindy Sherman,” *The Yearbook of Comparative Literature* 56 (2010): 6–23; Maya Linden, “‘Metaphors of War’: Desire, Danger, and Ambivalence in Anne Carson’s Poetic Form,” *Women’s Studies* 43 (2014): 230–45; Dina Georgis, “Discarded Histories and Queer Affects in Anne Carson’s *Autobiography of Red*,” *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 15, no. 2 (2014): 154–66; E.L. McCallum, “Toward a Photography of Love: The Tain of the Photograph in Anne Carson’s *Autobiography of Red*,” *Postmodern Culture* 17, no. 3 (2007); Monique Tschofen, “Drawing Out a New Image of Thought: Anne Carson’s Radical Ekphrasis,” *Word & Image* 29, no. 2 (2013): 233–43; Sophie Mayer, “Picture Theory: On Photographic Intimacy in Nicole Brossard and Anne Carson,” *Studies in Canadian Literature* 33, no. 1 (2008): 97–117; Judith Butler, “Can’t Stop Screaming,” Public Books, September 5, 2012, <https://www.publicbooks.org/cant-stop-screaming/>.

⁵⁷ See Kiene Brillenburg Wurth, “Re-Vision as Remediation,” *Image & Narrative* 14, no. 4 (2013): 20–33; Liedeke Plate, “How to Do Things with Literature in the Digital Age: Anne Carson’s *Nox*, Multimodality, and the Ethics of Bookishness,” *Contemporary Women’s Writing* 9, no. 1 (2015): 93–111; Tatiani G. Rapatzikou, “Anne Carson’s *Nox*: Materiality and Memory,” *Book 2.0* 7, no. 1 (2017): 57–65.

⁵⁸ Joan Fleming, “Talk (Why?) With Mute Ash’: Anne Carson’s *Nox* as Therapeutic Biography,” *Biography* 39, no. 1 (2016): 64–78; Jocelyn Parr, “A Signifying Shame: On Narrative, Repetition, and Distance in Anne Carson’s *Nox*,” *Zeitschrift Für Anglistik Und Amerikanistik* 62, no. 4 (2014): 341–58.

⁵⁹ Stang’s review of *Nox* similarly informed my reading, for it too centers on the themes of muteness and opacity. Charles M. Stang, “‘Nox,’ or the Muteness of Things,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 40, no. 1 & 2 (2012), <https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/articles/winterspring2012/nox-or-muteness-things>; Jill Marsden, “In Search of Lost Sense: The Aesthetics of Opacity in Anne Carson’s *Nox*,” *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (2013): 189–198.

possibility of sensory experience might be reconfigured anew.”⁶⁰ In reading Carson’s book alongside *Another Water* and *What Belongs to You*, I aim not only to elaborate upon a praxis that would orient itself towards exposing the obscurity of such a site, but also to draw out the sense of intimacy that arises upon coming into contact with the latter. I have also attempted to flesh out Carson’s sense of muteness even further by reading her descriptions of translation and historical inquiry alongside Roland Barthes’ reflections on photography.⁶¹ As I discuss at length in Chapter 2, she and Barthes similarly come to suffer an incapacity to speak when faced with the affective impact of another’s passing.

Roni Horn’s work has received, perhaps, even more attention than Carson’s writing. Thierry de Duve and Lynne Cooke have written on aspects of Horn’s oeuvre in a survey published by Phaidon⁶²; London’s Tate Modern and New York’s Whitney Museum both mounted a mid-career retrospective of her work in 2010⁶³; and scholars and theorists such as Nancy Spector, Briony Fer, Mark Godfrey, bell hooks, and Hélène Cixous have all addressed various facets of her practice.⁶⁴ As far as I can tell, however, *Another Water* has yet to be the

⁶⁰ Marsden, “In Search of Lost Sense: The Aesthetics of Opacity in Anne Carson’s *Nox*,” 196–97.

⁶¹ I should note that I am not the first to read Barthes’ *Camera Lucida* alongside Carson’s writing. In the essay “Towards a Photography of Love,” E.L. McCallum studies Barthes’s verbalization, or, in McCallum’s words, his narration of the absent Winter Garden Photograph in relation to the final section of Carson’s *Autobiography of Red*, which consists of a series of photographs in the form of poems. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982); McCallum, “Toward a Photography of Love: The Tain of the Photograph in Anne Carson’s *Autobiography of Red*.”

⁶² Louise Neri, *Roni Horn* (London, UK: Phaidon Press, 2000).

⁶³ The wonderful, 2-volume catalogue for this exhibition is part catalogue, part artist’s book. The first volume is more a less a standard catalogue for the show; for the second volume, however, Horn compiled a Subject Index for her work, and invited various curators, poets, writers, scholars, and art historians to contribute to the entries. Roni Horn, *Roni Horn Aka Roni Horn*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Gottingen, Germany: Steidl Publishers, 2009).

⁶⁴ Nancy Spector, “Roni Horn: Picturing Place,” in *Events of Relation*, by Laurence Bosse, Marie-Laure Bernadac, and Nancy Spector (Paris, France: Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1999), 15–51; Briony Fer, “Storm of the Eye,” in *Vatnasafn / Library of Water*, ed. James Lingwood and Gerrie van Noord (Gottingen, Germany: Steidl Publishers, 2009), 22–31; Mark Godfrey, “Roni Horn’s Icelandic Encyclopedia,” in *Photography after Conceptual Art*, ed. Diarmuid Costello and Margaret Iversen (Malden, MA: Wiley, 2010), 108–29; bell hooks, “Between Us: Traces of Love - Dickinson, Horn, Hooks,” in *Earth Grows Thick*, by bell hooks et al. (Columbus, OH: Wexner Center for the Arts, 1996), 57–64; Hélène Cixous, “Portraits of Portraits: The Very Day/Light of Roni Horn,” in *Poetry in Painting: Writings on Contemporary Arts and Aesthetics*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 75–78.

subject of any study. Scholars and critics, certainly, have mentioned the book in passing, often in relation to Horn's photographic installation *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)*, which similarly presents images of the Thames above a stream of footnotes; however, the formal, stylistic, and philosophical complexity of the book has yet to be discussed. I hope that my reading of *Another Water* engages that complexity. Since I have read the book, as it were, through the lens of literature on Horn's other works, I have woven references to manifold exhibition catalogues and essays into my discussion throughout Chapter 3.

Both Carson and Horn tend to let topics and questions overflow the bounds of individual works, and spill into others in more or less allusive ways. I have therefore elucidated my discussion of *Nox* by referencing additional essays and poetry by Carson, and brought out certain aspects of *Another Water* by considering the book alongside other series and texts by Horn. This dissertation, however, would have been an entirely different project if I had set my sights on articulating the correspondence between *Nox* and Carson's other writing, or the relation between *Another Water* and Horn's broader practice.⁶⁵ I have trained my focus, instead, on the space or the scene staged in and as the reader's encounter with the surface of each book; as in my reading of *What Belongs to You*, I read *Nox* and *Another Water* to sense what the images and words that make up each book might make palpable to any reader. This is not to deny that my familiarity with Carson's and Horn's oeuvres has shaped my reading at every turn, but simply to say that the questions driving this dissertation have turned my attention away from a rigorous analysis of each book in relation Carson's or Horn's other work, and towards the scene of reading itself.

⁶⁵ Pursuing either of these lines of inquiry might have also led to a study of Horn's and Carson's relation to each other, as traced both by Horn's book series *Wonderwater*, one volume of which Carson annotated at Horn's request, and by Carson's poem "Wildly Constant," which was composed during her residency at Horn's *Library of Water*, in Stykkishólmur, Iceland. See *Wonderwater (Alice Offshore)*, 4 vols. (Gottingen, Germany: Steidl Publishers, 2004); Anne Carson, "Wildly Constant," in *Float* (Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart, 2016); Elizabeth D. Harvey and Mark A. Cheetham, "Tongues of Glaciers: Sedimenting Language in Roni Horn's Vatnasafn/Library of Water and Anne Carson's 'Wildly Constant,'" *Word & Image* 31, no. 1 (2015): 19–27.

This dissertation aims to show that this scene, among others, opens onto the place where solitudes come to share an intimate space without relation.

Chapter 1

An Education in Erotic Sociality:

Techniques of the Pornographic Life in Garth Greenwell's *What Belongs to You*

Looking

On a crowded bus, the narrator in Garth Greenwell's novel *What Belongs to You* notices a fly on the windowpane.¹ With trepidation, he watches the fly alternately appear and disappear from behind a nearby passenger, who, oblivious to the threat he poses to the fly, rhythmically sways back and forth from the windowpane:

When the man leaned back, his coat falling over it again, I almost cried out to stop him. I waited for the fly to reappear, unable to look away from the spot I had last seen it. I had forgotten the stifling heat and the general misery of the ride in my concern for the creature and in my relief, when the man shifted again, to find it still intact. For the next few minutes I watched as the man leaned forward and back and the fly was covered and revealed [...] It was ridiculous to care so much, I knew, it was just a fly, why should it matter; but it did matter, at least while I watched it. (WB, 138-9)

The narrator recognizes the absurdity of concerning himself with the existence of a fly; he understands the senselessness of his attachment to so insignificant a thing, a thing, moreover, that might have appeared as nothing but “a buzzing nuisance” (WB, 138) in different circumstances. “But this one seemed special” (WB, 138), he says. So special, in fact, that it makes an irrevocable demand on his attention, provoking his concern for no apparent reason other than the fact that, at any given moment, he might no longer be able to watch it: to notice, for instance, that it might be “numbed by the cold of the window,” or to observe how “it clung to the pane despite the shuddering of the bus, until finally it made a tiny movement upward, like an exploratory step up the glass” (WB, 138). As improbable as it might seem, nothing more, but

¹ Greenwell, *What Belongs to You*. Hereafter cited parenthetically as WB.

nothing less than a fly on the verge of death rivets the narrator to his impressions of each passing moment, prompting at once his attention and care. As the narrator notes, his perverse attachment to the fly is sustained simply by the fact that he continues to look at it, or rather, by the fact that he already has, without even thinking, committed himself to seeing it again, to awaiting its reappearance each time it vanishes. “That’s all care is, I thought, it’s just looking at a thing long enough, why should it be a matter of scale?” (WB, 139). For the narrator, care does not precede the act; it does not cause him to look, but rather coincides with the act of looking itself. First moved by the fly to surrender himself to looking, he is at once overtaken by care for the thing he beholds.

We might read the narrator’s fascination with, attraction to, and care for the fly as a particular kind of fetishism. Here, the fetish neither signifies nor fills some transcendental lack; it does not fulfill its normal function as a protective talisman against loss. Perceived from the start in the shadow of its potential death, the fly rather draws the narrator’s attention to its singular mode of outliving its disappearance, attesting to its essential finitude each time it comes to view.² William Haver similarly associates the fetish with a form of attention that comes from engaging, rather than glossing over, the finitude of whatever might arrest the senses. “A fetish,” he writes, “is a fetish only in its singularity,” which is to say that the fetish provokes such undue care only insofar as it expresses more than the sum of its predicates; it captivates only insofar as it stands for and refers to nothing but its manner of being just as it is, and therefore attracts only on the basis of how it comes to appear (or disappear) in each passing moment.³ Haver continues: “If the

² In this respect, the narrator’s rapt attention to the beleaguered fly on the bus is reminiscent of Marguerite Duras’ entrancement by a dying fly in her house. Like the narrator, she too “had never thought about flies before, except probably to curse them,” but, in the moments before that similarly special fly’s death, she can not help but watch it, “to see, see how that death would progressively invade the fly.” Marguerite Duras, *Writing*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 28–36.

³ Or, to quote Agamben on singularity, the fetish “*is its thus* without remainder.” “The lover,” he writes elsewhere, “desires the *as* only insofar as it is *such* – this is the lover’s particular fetishism.” The “as,” here, refers precisely to

fetish signifies, but signifies nothing but its *signifiante*,” or its sheer potential to signify, then “any attention to that fetish can only be unmotivated: one attends to the fetish for the sake of nothing but that attention, which is to say: for the pleasure of the thing.”⁴ With his gaze fixed on the imperceptible spot where he last saw the fly, the narrator similarly sees through the experience of the fly’s disappearance only for the sake of seeing it again. He asks nothing of the fly but to be, and seeks nothing from it but the pleasure of admiring it – now for its surprising tenacity, now for a small step upward, now for its remarkable re-appearance [...].⁵ Further, he neither finds meaning in, nor attempts to extract value from their fortuitous encounter, or at least discovers no meaning or value in their relation other than the sense of concern that consumes him as he continues to watch or wait for the sight of the creature.

Even as the narrator remains enraptured by the fly, though, he notes that “it’s hard to look at things, or to look at them truly, and we can’t look at many at once, and it’s so easy to look away” (WB, 139). Despite, or perhaps precisely by virtue of being transfixed by the fly, the narrator realizes just how trying the practice of looking, or looking at things “truly” can be. The difficulty, he suggests, lies in looking at things as they are; the challenge, to put it in Haver’s terms, is to stay true to the thing in its singularity, that is, in its historicity and insistent withdrawal from meaning. “Pleasure, after all, is hard work,” Haver affirms.⁶ It takes endurance to look at things for the sake of looking alone, or, more generally, to give oneself over to the sense of the fetish. For doing so demands a stubborn attentiveness to detail, a studied receptivity

how any given being comes to be different from itself, each time, and every moment it (re)appears. See Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 28, 2; William Haver, “Really Bad Infinities: Queer’s Honour and the Pornographic Life,” *Parallax* 5, no. 4 (October 1999): 13, 15.

⁴ Haver, “Really Bad Infinities,” 13.

⁵ Conversely, I might add that the fly, in its indifference to the narrator’s gaze, likewise asks for nothing from him. As Terada notes on the phenomenophilic tendency to seek out “perceptual objects that ask for nothing, like violets in Keats and friends in Kant,” the narrator, in this sense, has “no obligation to *act on* its basis, no requirement to respond to its demand.” Terada, *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction, Kant to Adorno*, 30–31.

⁶ Haver, “Really Bad Infinities,” 13.

to the vicissitudes of each instant, and an active availability to being moved, or, as it very well may be, unsettled by “the pleasure of the thing.” Haver argues that there is a discipline to such a “comportment and attention,” as he puts it, albeit one that is hard to call a discipline at all, given that it centers precisely on the very elements that at once ground, and resist integration into systems of disciplinary control: bodies, in their singularity, and pleasures, in their capacity to disturb and disrupt, in passing, the self-possession of the subject.⁷ As if responding to Foucault’s call for “a nondisciplinary eroticism – that of a body in a volatile and diffused state, with its chance encounters and unplanned pleasures”⁸ – Haver proposes that “loyalty to the contingent, the fragmentary, the empirical, not in spite of, nor even because of, their finitude, but *as* the finitude they most assuredly, as such, *are*,” constitutes the “discipline and rigour of the pornographic life.”⁹ In contrast to those disciplines that would enlist bodies in the production of knowledge and the regimentation of the social, the discipline of the pornographic life would eroticize existence by mobilizing bodies towards no end other than the affective space onto which practices open. Such a life would therefore be lived in and as a mode of sensuous discovery, rather than normalization; in and as a form of sense, rather than significance.¹⁰ Indeed, in the act of looking, the narrator discovers, or even plays with his sense of being with the fly, without, for all that, ever standing outside or against his actions so as to invest them with meaning. As long as he remains as attentive to the fly’s disappearance and re-appearance as to the concomitant affects and pleasures that provoke him to keep up his watch, and, in so doing,

⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: Random House, 1980), 155–57.

⁸ Michel Foucault, “Sade: Sergeant of Sex,” in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 2*, ed. James E. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: The New Press, 1998), 227.

⁹ Haver, “Really Bad Infinities,” 12.

¹⁰ Haver invokes the pornographic to point to the fact that porn, as such, “does not [...] offer itself to a subject as an object for interpretation. This is not to say that porn cannot be interpreted or criticized, but that it is not to the gaze of a political or epistemological *subject* that it offers itself [...] Porn offers itself as the surplus of representation; porn is what in representation exceeds representation.” Haver, 12.

affirms his commitment to withstanding whatever might come between them, he can be said to practice the discipline of the pornographic life, with all of its attendant rigour.

Touching

What Belongs to You is punctuated by episodes in which the narrator imagines, remembers, and describes the feel of touching and being touched by others. Along with demonstrating the discipline of a life lived in devotion to contingency, these episodes show that no touch, however brief, is synonymous with itself or any other. Indeed, touching appears to draw his attention to that which exceeds the choreography of each caress, which is to say, to the affects that modulate touch stylistically, as by varying degrees of availability, theatricality, or absence. Consider, for instance, the narrator's recollection of the time he first embraced another boy. The narrator remembers the evening as a *pas de deux* in which he and his friend K. silently experiment with pleasures through a sequence of touches. At K.'s request, the narrator begins by massaging his back, kneading the skin on his shoulders, neck, and spine. He notes,

I wanted to keep touching him, and I was dismayed when K. shifted his weight, I thought he had had enough and was getting up. But instead he began to lean back, so slowly that I was confused at first and resisted him, pressing my hands more firmly against his back; it was only when he insisted that I understood and allowed him to lean into me, as he pressed farther leaning back in turn, so that we fell slowly backward until we were lying on the bed, I on the bed and K. on me. (WB, 81)

In this scene, touch exceeds its brute physicality – or perhaps, shows that physicality is always more than brute – and discloses itself as a mode of gestural communication: an improvised dance in which both K. and the narrator separately respond to what happens between them, without one or the other ever taking the lead. In this dance, the narrator carefully weighs the erotic charge of each moment, tentatively feels out both his and his friend's receptivity to different kinds of touch, and, moving from position to position alongside and in response to his friend, leans

towards a sense of the possibilities that lie between them. Having “reached around him as he lay back [...] I held him in an embrace that if he didn’t return he didn’t reject, either, he received it, he let his head fall back against my chest and we lay like that for a while” (WB, 81), the narrator continues, further delineating the play of advance and withdrawal that unpredictably shifts the tenor of his dance with K., imperceptibly opens their relation to unforeseen modes of being together, and all the while sustains the tension between them. Just as, faced with the re-appearance and disappearance of the fly, the narrator asked nothing of it but to come again to view, so the narrator asks nothing of K. but permission to keep touching, and nothing of touch but the corporeality or sensuous materiality to which it accedes.¹¹ “It didn’t occur to me to want more from that moment,” he adds, “to test it and see how far it might be stretched; it didn’t occur to me to touch him in some way other than I touched him” (WB, 81). Wholly riveted to the point of being nearly lost in the touch of each moment, the narrator finds perfection and beauty as, ever-attentive to the surface of things, he tenderly lingers on “a line where the sheets of muscle met, a rivulet or ridge” on K.’s abdomen, and meditates on the texture of his body hair, “impossibly soft and fine, like the skin of certain fruit” (WB, 81).

Engaging the insecurity, pleasures, and possibilities of each passing moment with K. provokes the narrator to keep touching his friend in dialogue with his body. If he knows that the evening will, as it must, come to an end, the thought of not being able to touch K. is manifest only as an intensified focus on the materiality of the body beside him, that is, as a longing to touch K. more, a feeling of not being able to touch him enough even as that touch goes nowhere, caught as it is on the ridge on K.’s abdomen. If the narrator’s hunger to touch is as superfluous as

¹¹ I take the phrasing “sensuous materiality” from Haver, where “materiality” is understood to refer to the singularity of things, that is, to that which at once founds the possibility of perception and meaning-making, and essentially escapes or exceeds the grasp of the subject. William Haver, “A Sense of the Common,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 3 (2012): 442; Haver, *The Body of This Death: Historicity and Sociality in the Time of AIDS*, 13–14.

it is insatiable, it is only insofar as K's body rouses him to touch to no end other than the very sense of touching, in all its variability. As the narrator's description of K's body attests, his touch neither seeks out nor aims to constitute an object, but rather reaches for the sensuous possibilities, infinite and inexhaustible, onto which touching gives way. He surrenders himself to the sense of touch to such an extent, that, following Agamben's reading of the Spinozian "immanent cause" as "an action in which agent and patient coincide," we might say that he constitutes himself as touching, which is to say, as being-touched with every touch, a "subject who testifies of the affection that he receives insofar as he is in relation with a body," or, in this case, in contact with K.'s.¹² In other words, he constitutes himself in relation to his own passivity – a passivity, in this instance, that is equivalent to neither powerlessness, nor subjection to or dependence on another, but rather to a capacity or power to be undone in the presence of other bodies, a capacity that is therefore the precondition for self-transformation.¹³ When the narrator, on another occasion, is in fact subject to violence, he is forced to experience this capacity in all its terror, such that he can no longer move in response to how he is affected, but can only be moved by physical force; he can only let his body be handled, and, as if his mind were reduced to machine, think nothing but "whatever happens next I will let happen" (WB, 54).¹⁴ Being with K., in contrast, makes room for him to move with pleasure, that is, to act freely from out of a place of passivity, letting him carry himself back outside his body with every touch. Just as,

¹² Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 29–30, 164–65.

¹³ I understand passivity, in this sense, to correspond to what Agamben refers to elsewhere as impotentiality, or the power to not-be. He writes: "To be potential means: to be one's own lack, *to be in relation to one's own incapacity*. Beings that exist in the mode of potentiality *are capable of their own impotentiality*; and only in this way do they become potential. They *can be* because they are in relation to their own non-Being." Giorgio Agamben, "On Potentiality," in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 182.

¹⁴ This episode of violence clearly demonstrates how power relations can severely constrain the constitutive capacity of bodies to respond to sense. It also raises the question of how, from within such a network of relations, and, like the narrator, reeling from the shock of violence, the subject might again come to constitute itself in relation to an enabling passivity. Ziarek raises a similar question in Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012), 108–9.

looking at a fly, he can constitute himself as affected by its presence or absence, so too, touching K., does he take responsibility for the fear, confusion, happiness, peace – in short, to quote Haver, for the “the chaos of the affects and passions” that attest to how he is moved by K.’s body.¹⁵ Rather than constituting himself as a subject in relation to an object, then, he is transformed by attending to how he senses other bodies, a transformation that the hitherto undiscovered pleasures that suffuse his time with K. affirm, no less than the disbelief he expresses when he finds himself caring for a fly.

In this regard, it is noteworthy that the narrator’s description of K.’s body renders the latter as rather impenetrable, even impersonal. Indeed, in the narrator’s arms, his friend’s body appears to exist as nothing but a surface that offers itself again and again to touch, a fragmented, infinitely divisible surface composed of equally dear parts, each of which, like the ridge on his abdomen, might come to be the source of inexhaustible pleasure.¹⁶ This variable surface so commands the narrator’s attention, that whatever might be happening outside the sense of touching K. passes by unnoticed, or, at any rate, without comment. If K.’s actions also bear witness to how he is moved by the narrator, the latter neither claims, nor offers any insight into K.’s sense of things, as if the process of constituting himself as touching carried the power to neutralize the will to make something out of K.’s gestures or poses – something, that is, other than the intelligence that modes of mobility and stillness already communicate, just as they are. In fact, the narrator’s description suggests that he attends to K.’s body with a certain understanding that whatever he touches will have never been *for* him or anyone else to know or to hold, but rather will have always remained out of reach, despite, or perhaps precisely because

¹⁵ Haver, “Really Bad Infinities,” 13.

¹⁶ In this respect, K. might be said to provoke the narrator to sense what Jean-Luc Nancy calls “the body *partes extra partes*,” which is to say, the body that exists as extended to the world, as nothing but a ceaseless “imparting of parts.” Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2008), 27–28.

of the innumerable affections to which the surface of K.'s body gives way. Touching, in other words, brings them together only insofar as it also keeps them apart, at a distance as minute as it is absolute. Touching each other, they each touch on a common space of affection to which neither has access, a space that marks the place where something different might happen between them every time they separately respond to how they each sense the other's body. Touching thus suspends their relation at its point of emergence: no longer or not yet determined, it comes to be poised, with each passing moment, between what it was and what it might be.¹⁷

Years later, with his arms around a Bulgarian hustler named Mitko, the narrator is once again moved to touch "for the touch itself" (WB, 182). In contrast to his delight with K., however, he embraces Mitko, who has just announced that he may only have one year left to live, with a pained awareness of the finitude of the body to which he is drawn:

As I pressed my face to his neck and breathed him in, his scent sour with sweat and alcohol, it seemed impossible it could dissolve, simply dissolve, this form I had known so intimately with my hands and my mouth, it was unbearable that this body so dear to me should die. But though I held him more tightly the space that had opened up between us remained, and I knew I would stay on the other side of it, the side of health, I knew I wouldn't stay with Mitko and face the death he faced; I know it's everywhere, that it's an illusion we ever look anywhere else, but as long as I could believe it I would pretend to look away. (WB, 180)

The possibility that Mitko's body may dissolve, however improbable, discloses "some great space between us, an even greater distance than had existed before" (WB, 178). Swooning in Mitko's scent, the narrator clearly remains attentive to and entranced by the pleasures of being with him, but, in this instance, the discipline of the pornographic life also awakens him to the feel of Mitko's body vanishing from within his embrace, as if it were disappearing from beneath his fingers. Even as he and Mitko continue to hold each other, the narrator's sense that "soon I

¹⁷ Based on the narrator's account, his time with K. seems to stage "that muddled middle," a term that Lauren Berlant uses to cast the scene of relationality as a space of instability, as a room occupied by "the chaos of styles that one brings to relationality and that relationality induces." I will return to Berlant's sense of relationality. Berlant and Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable*, 4, 82.

wouldn't be able to touch him [...] maybe I would never touch him again" (WB, 182), makes of Mitko's body a strange, faded thing, something simultaneously so close so as to be able to hold even tighter, and so far as to be "already unreachable" (WB, 179). Faced with the prospect of Mitko's death, the narrator is at once confronted by his reluctance to dispel the "illusion we ever look anywhere else," which is to say, the illusion that relation can ever take place without the intrusion of non-Being, without, that is, the insistence of "some great space between us." Once Mitko's prognosis has magnified the distance that had always been the measure of their relation, the narrator can no longer touch the body before him without being struck both by his willingness to look away from the fate that he and Mitko, despite all of their differences, will have always shared, and by his desire to gloss over the space that irreparably separates him from others.

Beginning to doubt his capacity for intimacy, the narrator goes on to remark, "Love isn't just a matter of looking at someone, I think now, but also of looking with them, of facing what they face" (WB, 180). Here, the narrator's care for the fly, as expressed by his inability to "look away from the spot where I had last seen it," takes on a different resonance. By staying with the fly even in the wake of its disappearance, or, more precisely, by fixing his eyes on the place where the fly might never again come to appear, the narrator, no longer looking at the fly, can be said to "face the death (it) faced," where death is figured by the nearby passenger who rocks threateningly to and fro. Indeed, each time the passenger inadvertently obscures the fly with his coat, the narrator steadfastly stands witness to the place where it can no longer or not yet be seen. Withstanding the separation between them, he performatively presents a commitment, in John Paul Ricco's terms, to the space of "shared-separation" that opens the possibility of looking

towards whatever might come with another, and thus creates the conditions for love.¹⁸ In this respect, the scene in which the narrator visually traces the fly's effacement resembles Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, which similarly traces Rauschenberg's erasure of William de Kooning's marks. Ricco argues that "the single sheet of paper that is the material basis" for the *Erased de Kooning* allows for, or rather exists as the surface where Rauschenberg and de Kooning come to "share a non-relational space in which drawing and erasing are no longer diametrically opposed," but are rather techniques that orient them both "in the same direction, onto a future without [...] the sociality that is the relation of ego to ego that typically goes by the name of community."¹⁹ As if Rauschenberg and de Kooning were touching bodies, each one touching or being-touched, drawing, here exposed as a mode of erasing, and erasing, as a mode of drawing, bring both artists into contact with the common space of affection that is the single sheet of paper, turning them both towards whatever might come between them. The imperceptible place where the fly, concealed by the coat of the indifferent passenger, may or may not remain, similarly exists as the surface where the narrator and the fly come to share a non-reciprocal bond, or rather, come to partake in a space where attesting to disappearance and coming to re-appear happen to coincide. Like drawing and erasing, the narrator and the fly's techniques, as it were, bring them together by virtue of binding them not to each other, but to a place, a place marked only by the radical indeterminacy that is the future.²⁰ Both the *Erased de Kooning* and the image of the unseen fly, then, present the scene of "an affective bond that interminably awaits its completion, as it is cast out and returned back, inscribed an erased," or

¹⁸ Ricco, *The Decision Between Us: Art and Ethics in the Time of Scenes*, 28.

¹⁹ Ricco, 35, 38, 43.

²⁰ Read alongside Ricco, the passenger on the bus, or more precisely, his coat, which quite literally intrudes on the intimate scene between the narrator and fly, might also be said to figure the force of intrusion as "the force field of our being-together," or "the spacing of shared existence." Ricco, 66.

disclosed and disappeared at once.²¹ When the narrator watches the fly even as it vanishes from view, when he inhales Mitko's scent even as the latter recedes to stand on that other shore, and even when he touches K. as each passing moment, having absconded with the body touched but a moment ago, offers more to touch, he too attests to a commitment to sustaining a bond that, "in its persistent open-endedness, always remains to be shared," that is, worked out as it is simultaneously severed, or affirmed as it is simultaneously undone.²² To trace the contours of a thing, whether with hands, eyes, or an eraser, is at once to trace an intimate space of non-relation, or, better yet, to sense the emergence of intimacy as it comes to pass.

Being Together

Read in juxtaposition with each other and alongside Ricco's discussion of the *Erased de Kooning*, the scenes that I have discussed might be characterized as proposed solutions to the problem of relationality. How is the world disclosed to bodies? How do bodies come to be sensed? And how, that is, by what means or techniques, do different modes of sensing and knowing the world, oneself, and others come to be? Given that the existence of both the social itself, and the phenomenological and epistemological subject are at stake in these questions, the problem of relationality concerns philosophy and queer theory alike. Within queer theoretical discourse, responses to this problem consistently stress the political and social necessity of inventing new ways of being with oneself and others, but diverge significantly when it comes to the questions of how, where, and to what end (if any), the multiplication of modes of relation takes place. Notably, Judith Butler locates the possibility of difference in the subject's relation to power. She argues that the subject becomes possible, that is, capable of self-differing and

²¹ Ricco, 38.

²² Ricco, 31.

differing from others, only insofar as it first incorporates the power impressed upon it.²³

Differentiation, for Butler, thus takes place in and as performance, or, more precisely, the performative reiteration of the regulatory norms to which the subject also owes its existence as such.²⁴ On this account, the subject is essentially separated from itself, set outside the acts by which it simultaneously cites, and differentially produces the norms by which it derives its intelligibility. Subjectivity therefore emerges only insofar as it leaves in its wake a “constitutive outside,” a space that at once founds, and falls outside the terms of recognition that demarcate the subject’s historical possibilities.²⁵ The constitutive outside might be characterized as the originary place of the subject, unliveable, unspeakable, and illegible insofar as it marks the very place of the performative, that is, the passing moment in which the subject, taking place, comes to be. If, as Butler writes, “the temporal paradox of the subject is such that, of necessity, we must lose the perspective of a subject already formed in order to account for our own becoming,” then the constitutive outside exists precisely as that space of loss, or rather, as the presence of what is lost with every act.²⁶ In this respect, the structure of subjectivity as conceived by Butler resembles the structure of the archive as theorized by Derrida. Just as the subject materializes in and as the forgetting of lived time, so too the archive, Derrida claims, “takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown” of “spontaneous, alive and internal experience.”²⁷ In both cases, meaning accumulates in the shadow of a constitutive exteriority that at once founds, and falls outside the order of knowledge, an order that delimits the possibilities for writing both the

²³ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 10–18.

²⁴ Butler, “Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy,” 27–28.

²⁵ See the Preface, and Introduction to Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*.

²⁶ Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 30.

²⁷ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 1996, 11.

past and the future of the subject and the archive alike.²⁸ Constitutively condemned to recuperate and rearticulate its infinitely retreating origins under its own name, the subject, on Butler's account, will have always lived by an archival logic.

Agamben submits this structure to an extensive critique throughout and beyond the *Homo Sacer* series. He shows the complicity between the Western philosophical tradition and the biopolitical regime that would regulate and administer modes of life, by aligning what he identifies as “the structure of the *archè* of our culture” with the mechanism that produces “bare life,” which is to say, a life that resembles the constitutive outside insofar as it founds the possibility of politically qualified life only on the condition of being excluded from the political.²⁹ Whereas Butler admits to the urgency in inquiring after the unmarked bodies that populate the outside of the social, her conception of the subject as self-grounding forecloses the possibility of thinking a sociality that would not rest on an analogous exclusion.³⁰ Agamben's project is arguably dedicated to elaborating the terms and categories by which such a sociality might be articulated, with the goal of opening up a radically other space for politics. Rather than attributing transformative potential to the constituent force of the performative, he looks beyond the subject, that is, beyond the iterative actualization of the possible, to identify a “purely destituent potential” as the very source of difference.³¹ The experience of such a potential does not hinge on any passage into actuality, but rather on the loss, undoing, or unbecoming upon which the subject's becoming depends; it is to experience, in Agamben's words, a capacity or potential to

²⁸ Ibid., 52. Given this structural resemblance, it is perhaps not surprising that performance itself has been theorized as a kind of archive. See Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011).

²⁹ Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 265; Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 109–11.

³⁰ Lynne Huffer similarly notes Butler's “investment in a subject-making form of power-knowledge” in Lynne Huffer, *Are the Lips a Grave?: A Queer Feminist on the Ethics of Sex* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013), 18; Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, xxiv.

³¹ In Derridean terms, one might say that Agamben looks towards the anarchival force borne by the archive, a force that founds the archive on its own undoing. Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 271–74; Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 1996, 10.

not-be – an “impotentiality” – that is co-constitutive with the potential to be.³² For Agamben, the paradigmatic figure of such an experience is not, like performance, a movement that exhausts itself in an external end, but rather contemplation, or “thought.” “To think does not mean merely to be affected by this or that thing, by this or that content of enacted thought,” he writes, “but rather at once to be affected by one’s own receptiveness.”³³ In other words, thought is the movement by which the thinking subject turns back towards the place of its emergence to experience *how* it bears its affections, or, in Butlerian terms, *how* it suffers the impression of power. Thought, in other words, brings the subject in contact with the space of affection that marks the place of its unmaking, a place where sense – the affective *how* - unfolds in all of its infinite modalities.

Drawing on Agamben’s vocabulary, we might then say that when the narrator in *What Belongs to You* is moved by the pleasure of touching K., he experiments with his capacity to not-touch, and, roused by his concern to keep looking at the fly, he contemplates his potential to not-look. The transformative potential to not-do or not-be is simply made manifest when he embraces Mitko’s figure, and gazes at the place of the disappeared fly. As discussed earlier, these episodes bring to light a non-relational mode of being-with, a mode in which, to quote Agamben, “we are united to one another in the form of our being alone,” intimate beyond any relation.³⁴ A body of literature in queer theory similarly foregrounds the non-relational dimension of being together, turning away from the subject’s relation to the disciplinary

³² Agamben has shown that the distinction between potentiality and actuality similarly conforms to the structure of the *archè*, for it is maintained by means of a constitutive exclusion, an exclusion, in this instance, of impotentiality. Agamben explains the necessity of impotentiality quite succinctly when he writes, “if potentiality is to have its own consistency and not always disappear immediately into actuality, it is necessary that potentiality be able *not* to pass over into actuality, that potentiality constitutively be the *potentiality not to* (do or be).” Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 45. See also Agamben, “On Potentiality.”

³³ Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 9.

³⁴ Further: “We are together and very close, but between us there is not an articulation or a relation that unites us.” I will return to Agamben’s sense of aloneness in the Epilogue. Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 236–38.

apparatus of power and towards the source of relationality in general to locate another place of invention, and imagine different modes of sociality. Leo Bersani puts this position forcefully when he writes that “the degeneration of the sexual into a relationship [...] condemns sexuality to becoming a struggle for power,” where “the sexual” here names the place of a radical desubjectification, or even dehumanization, whose affective force is not unlike that of the destituent potential that enables thought to sense itself.³⁵ For Bersani, the transformative potential of the sexual lies in its capacity to derealize the subjectivities that, as such, are inextricably entwined with the operations of power, thereby (re)opening the question of how to be with ourselves and others. Lee Edelman and Laurent Berlant, with the shared goal of upending any mode of being-in-common that would rest on the production or accomplishment of a future, similarly take what they call “sex” as the place of “the unbearable,” which is to say, as the non-relational dimension of any relation.³⁶ Whereas Edelman associates sex with a Lacanian form of absolute negativity, a force of resistance that bars all entry, Berlant affirms instead that it consists of a scene in which “negativity [...] is sensed, inarticulately, as a condition of being in the world a certain way, that is, as a feeling of displacement that is inevitable.”³⁷ In other words, sex provokes the subject to sense the gap, or, as Berlant says elsewhere, the “out-of-synchness” between the affective force of the unbearable, and the historical conditions of any given encounter.³⁸ On this account, the scene of sex opens up an affective space apart from, but contingent upon the social that would always already be enacted. In this space, the moment that passes as the subject appears – the time that the subject forgets in order to be – comes to be sensed

³⁵ Leo Bersani, *Is The Rectum a Grave?* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 24–25.

³⁶ It is worth noting that Berlant and Edelman pursue this “goal” together in the form of a published dialogue, which, as such, gestures toward the possibility of further conversation, even if, of necessity, it must also come to an end. Berlant and Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable*.

³⁷ Berlant and Edelman, 91.

³⁸ Berlant and Edelman, 56.

in its very passage, such that the subject discovers the means to “mov(e) differently with affect,” that is, to shift the conditions in which it comes into contact with the scene of its undoing.³⁹ For Berlant, being-with thus takes place as an affective scene of ambivalence and instability, a potentially transformative scene insofar as it occasions, with every passing moment, “an experiment in potential form that does not seek out *a* form.”⁴⁰ Indeed, the space of affection that finds relationality renders every form destitute no sooner than it is made.

With her conception of being-with as a scene of experimentation, Berlant affirms that the gesture of sensing one’s affections, that is, thought itself as theorized by Agamben, constitutively inhabits every action, whether voluntary or not.⁴¹ More precisely, we might say that thought necessarily inhabits every mode of being – modes such as looking, touching, and holding – for the distinction between activity and passivity no longer obtains when it comes to the power to not-be to which thought attests. In *The Body of this Death*, William Haver foregrounds the erotics of modes of being that attend to the finitude of thought, and, in so doing, work against the production of any one form.⁴² He reads David Wojnarowicz and Sue Golding to argue that material practices, insofar as they are both provoked by and drawn toward that which exceeds the knowable – for instance, something as mundane as the possible death of a disappeared fly – testify to what he calls “an erotics of thought.”⁴³ Such an erotics, Haver argues, is a question of a “praxis of poiesis,” which is to say, a praxis comparable to the experimentation that Berlant locates in and as the scene of relationality, insofar as it is also concerned with sustaining or

³⁹ As Berlant argues in *Cruel Optimism*, “the present is perceived, first, affectively: the present is what makes itself present to us before it becomes anything else.” Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 4; Berlant and Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable*, 89.

⁴⁰ Berlant and Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable*, 79.

⁴¹ Here, following Foucault, “thought is understood as the very form of action,” for “there is no experience that is not a way of thinking and cannot be analyzed from the viewpoint of the history of thought.” Michel Foucault, “Preface to The History of Sexuality, Volume Two,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York, NY: New Press, 1997), 201; Berlant and Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable*, 100.

⁴² Haver, *The Body of This Death: Historicity and Sociality in the Time of AIDS*.

⁴³ Haver, 121–22, 138, 181.

exposing, by imaginative, figurative, or otherwise poietic means, the open question of how be in relation with others.⁴⁴ Haver departs from Berlant, however, in explicitly identifying this open question as the mode of existence of the social. ““The social,”” he writes, “is the lure toward which poiesis moves but is actualized or realized only as and in the play of that ungraspable movement.”⁴⁵ In other words, the movement of poiesis does not consummate itself in a work, even if it does, in fact, leave a form behind, but rather sets the stage for (the scene of) relationality, and thus opens the space that is the social.⁴⁶ As the realization of a “lure,” poiesis here consists of an “erotic usage of body and language,” which is to say, “a movement that at once accomplishes signification and withdraws or secedes from signification.”⁴⁷ Poiesis thus bears an erotic charge in and of itself, for, by virtue of being the occasion of a withdrawal or secession, it embodies a force that does not cease to reach for more than what can be seen, said, and known even as it produces residues of that reaching, so many traces of pleasure and longing, like, for instance, the narrator’s memory of wanting to touch K. more.⁴⁸ Or, as Haver writes of Golding’s rituals of remembrance, “such material practices, such usages, such implements [...] are *erotically* mementos of the erotic, of erotic sociality; they are practices, usages, and implements that are, even as they stand for or in the place of, the essential historicity or impermanence of the social.”⁴⁹ Poiesis, as it moves towards and, in and as its movement,

⁴⁴ As Berlant writes, with a characteristic emphasis on “living” rather than being-in-relation per se, she is interested in modes of “reconceiving the objects/scenes of the world as laboratories for an ongoing question of how living might be structured.” Berlant and Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable*, 104; Haver, *The Body of This Death: Historicity and Sociality in the Time of AIDS*, 143, 191.

⁴⁵ Haver, *The Body of This Death: Historicity and Sociality in the Time of AIDS*, 191.

⁴⁶ Haver, 191–94.

⁴⁷ Haver, 138, 145, 183–84.

⁴⁸ Quoting Golding, Haver describes “the seductions of the ‘endlessly compelling attraction, the concrete infinity, of technē,’” and remarks that “it is this poiesis or technē that is itself the seductiveness of the social.” Haver, *The Body of This Death: Historicity and Sociality in the Time of AIDS*, 194. The movement of poiesis could also go by the name “art’s work,” which Haver similarly describes as “only coincidentally concerned with the production of the works of art that are its curiously irrelevant residue,” and, additionally, as “the art of disappearance.” Haver, “Really Bad Infinities,” 13.

⁴⁹ Haver, *The Body of This Death: Historicity and Sociality in the Time of AIDS*, 183–84.

continually (re)invents, and thus affirms the contingency of the social, accordingly corresponds to a technique that “is in fact an *unworking*, a refusal of the domestic consolations of culture and knowing, (a) laying bare its absence-of-ground,” much like, as Ricco argues, Rauschenberg’s gesture not only undoes de Kooning’s work, but also turns back on the “consolations” of meaning and identity, thereby “laying bare,” in and as the materiality of a sheet of paper, the place of erasure that guarantees nothing but the essential indeterminacy of being-in-common, the place of withdrawal or affection that will have always kept the future open.⁵⁰ As theorized by Haver, an erotics of thought would take the form of a praxis similarly oriented towards exposing the impossibility of grounding the social through the poietic presentation of the space of separation that, essentially undone, exceeds both apprehension and comprehension.⁵¹

What Belongs to You offers a catalogue of scenes in which various modes of being affirm the non-relational space of separation or affection that founds the possibility of erotic sociality. Seeing, touching, and holding here constitute “techniques of the pornographic life,” for in accordance with the discipline of the pornographic life, they both draw attention to the look, texture, taste, and scent of anything whatever in its singularity, that is, as a fetish, and attest to the erotics of looking with others towards a future that, in its absolute indeterminacy, is without relation.⁵² To put it in Haver’s words, these practices “require a ritual attention to the historicity of passage,” and, in their orientation towards the limit of experience, affirm both the

⁵⁰ Haver, 116, 143; Ricco, *The Decision Between Us: Art and Ethics in the Time of Scenes*, 43, 46.

⁵¹ The very formulation “praxis of poesis” affirms that a means to an end (poesis) can take place as an end unto itself (praxis), thereby confounding the classical distinction between means and ends. It is in this sense that Haver’s understanding of poesis as a movement without end also resembles Agamben’s theorization of the gesture, which “breaks with the false alternative between ends and means that paralyzes morality and presents instead means that, *as such*, evade the orbit of mediality without becoming, for this reason, ends.” Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, 56–57.

⁵² Haver, “Really Bad Infinities,” 18.

impossibility of finding the terms by which to finally ground being-in-common, and the allure of that which is without common measure.⁵³

Writing

On a train, the narrator in *What Belongs to You* is enchanted by a young boy who shares the same cabin as him and his mother. The boy's smile, petulance, laughter, candor, playfulness, tears – in short, everything of the boy that the narrator has the chance to notice during their brief time together – provoke a flood of associations that move him to write down his “impressions” (WB, 167) or sense of the moment. When it comes time to disembark and leave the boy behind, however, the narrator begins to doubt the drive to memorialize that he had always assumed motivated his writing practice:

...I looked once more at the little boy, whom I felt I would never forget, though maybe it wasn't exactly him I would remember, I thought, but the use I would make of him. I had my notes, I knew I would write a poem about him, and then it would be the poem I remembered, which would be both true and false at once, the image I made replacing the real image. Making poems was a way of loving things, I had always thought, of preserving them, of living moments twice; or more than that, it was a way of living more fully, of bestowing on experience a richer meaning. But that wasn't what it felt like when I looked back at the boy, wanting a last glimpse of him; it felt like a loss. Whatever I could make of him would diminish him, and I wondered whether I wasn't really turning my back on things in making them into poems, whether instead of preserving the world I was taking refuge from it. (WB, 170-1)

Just as the threat of the fly's demise, the thought of parting from K., and the prospect of separating from Mitko arouse the narrator to exercise the discipline of the pornographic life, so too does leaving the boy set the stage for him to practice an erotics of thought. Indeed, departing from the boy provokes the narrator to call into question the end of writing, such that he is at once exposed to the limits of representation, and confronted with the sense that something of

⁵³ As a result, these practices also disclose “the fundamental contingency of any possible normativity.” Haver, *The Body of This Death: Historicity and Sociality in the Time of AIDS*, 181, 183.

experience will forever exceed the grasp of the writer or poet, or, in other words, elude the mastery of the speaking and knowing subject. From an instrumental thought of writing as a means to preserve, record, or represent the world, the narrator's attention shifts toward the possibility that writing might instead leave behind evidence of a movement of making and unmaking. "Both true and false at once, the image [...] replacing the real image," any poem about the boy, the narrator suggests, would attest to both an inscription and an erasure, or more precisely, to inscription *as* erasure. It is as if, having questioned what making poems accomplishes, the narrator now suspects that his writing, as Haver writes of Wojnarowicz' practice, in fact consists of "a gesture or movement, of which that which is made is no more, but no less, than the trace of its making," that is, "the trace of a poiesis, figuration, [...] the fact *that there is* poiesis."⁵⁴ As the narrator notes, he will not remember the boy, but rather "the use I would make of him," a use to be documented in the poem that he already knows he will write, despite, or perhaps precisely because of the risk of being without any memory of the boy himself. This, then, is the thought of a writing that would not triumph in the production of knowledge. However enriching the project of interpreting experience might be, this writing would not be valued for the content of its contribution to the archive, content that, in accordance with archival logic, would be consigned to go by the name of one author for perpetuity, but instead would be honored for attesting to the poietic movement that brings into being the social, a space, as Haver writes, "in fact invented as repetition, at every moment," a space constitutively re-created as de-created, a space, therefore, that is without ground, without reason, and without relation.⁵⁵ As a record of or testament to "the fact that it was made," a poem would register the fact that experience – including, thereafter, each experience of reading the poem – can never be

⁵⁴ Haver, 158–59.

⁵⁵ Haver, 143.

lived twice, but, in and as the historicity and singularity of each moment, can only ever come to pass.⁵⁶ The narrator, then, thinks of a writing that would divert focus away from the meaning that it would nevertheless achieve – a meaning that would take the form of an object offered to the epistemological or phenomenological subject – so as to gesture towards the condition of possibility for the creation of any object, which is to say, to the “erotic usage of body and language” that, in defiance of any justification other than its own incessant movement, unfolds simultaneously as the space of being-in-common, and as a longing that outlives any act of inscription. The very thought of such a writing draws the narrator’s attention to his sense of already being at a loss, or, to put it in different terms, towards the affective force of finitude, the very force, perhaps, that lures the narrator to look back to catch that one last glimpse of the boy.⁵⁷

A writing, then, that attests to the praxis of a poesis – a writing that thereby affirms an erotics of thought – would indeed begin with the gesture of “turning my back on things.” Drawn to look back at the boy just one last time, the narrator seems to recognize that he can not write at all without first betraying the moments or things that he intends to save. Even as the narrator scrambled to capture his impressions of the scene on the train, he had already “made use of,” and thereby betrayed the boy, who, infinitely retreating in his singularity, had likewise already

⁵⁶ Haver, 159.

⁵⁷ To quote John Paul Ricco, “As the social-spatial force of the Outside, attraction is no more and no less than whatever lures you to walk through just one more time, to linger a few minutes longer, to go back again and again, just as you were about to leave, or quit, each and every time.” Although, looking back at the boy, the narrator says that the thought of writing about him “felt like a loss,” it would be equally true to say that a poem about the boy would offer access to a space of sociality that registers as loss only from the perspective of the subject. In other words, the poem would allow for the writer’s exposure to an exteriority that will have never been assimilated by the phenomenological subject, an exteriority that would therefore exceed anything that can be conceived, said, and done from within any given historical context. Rather than speaking of loss, then, we might as well look towards that which exceeds the subject and, following Ricco, Foucault, and Blanchot, speak of the erotic force of the Outside, a force that infinitely comes to pass at the very limit of language, and seduces insofar as it offers nothing but “an absence that pulls as far away from itself as possible, receding into the sign it makes to draw one towards it (as though it were possible to reach it).” Ricco, *The Logic of the Lure*, 11; Michel Foucault, “Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside,” in *Foucault/Blanchot* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1987), 28.

abandoned the narrator to his impossible task. But far from compromising the intimacy between the narrator and the boy, this mutual abandonment or betrayal – this “traitorous collaboration,” as Ricco writes of Rauschenberg and de Kooning’s relation as it is presented in and as the *Erased de Kooning Drawing* – constitutes the very conditions of erotic sociality.⁵⁸ Indeed, the narrator suggests that turning one’s back on another might in fact stage the scene of intimacy in a passage in which he recollects the rare occasions when, as a child, he and his father would watch the stars side-by-side, lying on the grass and wrapped in each other’s arms. As the narrator recalls, his father used to “withdraw into his own reveries or contemplation” or “longings” (WB, 64-5, 70), but, he adds, “his withdrawal didn’t diminish our closeness but deepened it, it was a sign of vulnerability and trust, like an animal turning its back” (WB, 70). If the father’s withdrawal into reverie is not conceived as a retreat into some subjective interiority, but rather, as Leo Bersani writes of fantasy, into “a type of unrealized or derealized human and world,” then the narrator’s memory of star-gazing with his father comes to resonate with his final encounter with Mitko, whose ailing body, similarly half-there and half-gone, teaches him the stakes of looking with another towards the face of death, or of sharing the space of separation that comes with being together.⁵⁹ Whereas, embracing Mitko, he pretends to avert his eyes from the unsurpassable distance that discloses itself between them, a space to which being with Mitko had nevertheless drawn his attention from the start, he stays with his father even as he retreats. Apart from, momentarily forgotten, or abandoned by his father, the narrator senses the intimacy of being with someone who has turned his back on the world – so much so that he remembers, paradoxically, feeling a sense of wholeness on those nights, as if to affirm that his father’s withdrawal also made room for him to fully inhabit himself, or rather, to forge an intimate relation to himself. So,

⁵⁸ Ricco, *The Decision Between Us: Art and Ethics in the Time of Scenes*, 45.

⁵⁹ Leo Bersani, “Psychoanalysis and the Aesthetic Subject,” in *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 149.

if turning one's back on things – be it through fantasizing, writing, or another technique – involves “taking refuge” from the world rather than preserving it, it is only insofar as the gesture of turning one's back realizes the space of affection that both threatens and makes possible relation; if a poem or an image makes for a refuge rather than a record, it is only to the extent that, like fantasy, it constitutes a scene of the world's undoing, a scene that would therefore figure relationality as non-relational, much like the *Erased de Kooning* and the scene with the fly on the bus.⁶⁰ Indeed, should the narrator turn his back on the boy in and as the writing of a poem, he and the boy would also stand facing in the same direction, an orientation that would at once affirm the relation between them as a question, open a space for experimenting with ways of being together through the usage of language, and support or sustain the intimacy between them. As the narrator suggests, love, here, would not just be a matter of preserving an object to contemplate, just as it is not only a matter of looking at something, but instead would lie in the praxis of a poiesis that addresses itself to the distance that brings embraced bodies even closer, and makes of every poem a love letter to an un-made world.

Reading

For all the times that the narrator in *What Belongs to You* expresses resistance to looking with others towards a future that will have always remained un-envisaged, he also shows a remarkable aptitude for it, such that any reader who follows his gaze as it is drawn towards that

⁶⁰ I acknowledge that the narrator might be more conventionally escapist than I want him to be; that, for him, “taking refuge” in poetry might mean protecting himself against all that threatens his mastery of the world, rather than losing himself in the intimacy of a shared space with others. On the other hand, the fact that he comes to the sense of poetry as a refuge only after being confronted with the limits of knowledge upon departing from the boy, or rather, after experiencing the limits of representation in and as the thought of writing about the boy, suggests that he has indeed sensed “in emptiness and destitution the presence of the outside and, tied to that presence, the fact that one is irremediably outside the outside.” It is of course possible that, despite this recognition, the narrator uses writing to shelter himself from the affective force of that alluring presence, just as he protects himself from being in relation with Mitko by pretending away the force of finitude that threatens every relation, and thus forecloses the possibility of intimacy. Foucault, “Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside,” 28.

which exceeds the visible might also find itself facing in the same direction as both him, and whoever else, at any given moment, he happens to be standing with, all withstanding the affective force of finitude together. Indeed, reading, much like writing, looking, and touching, consists in at once realizing, and sharing an intimate scene of non-relation. Insofar as Greenwell's novel presents a repertoire of techniques that attest to an erotics of thought, I would argue that it also gestures towards a mode of reading that would steadfastly look towards, or touch on the space of affection that keeps the future open. This is a reading that would turn its back on representation and interpretation so as to attend to the poietic movement that both makes of each reading an untranslatable event, and unfolds in and as the space (and sense) of being-in-common.⁶¹ A mode of reading, then, that would not so much offer an alternative model – whether paranoid, reparative, deconstructive, or hermeneutic – but rather would take place as an engagement with the inventive or differentiating power immanent in every reading.⁶² Or, to quote Claire Colebrook, a mode of reading that would both affirm and attest to the delectations of “that creative, queering, divergent, and transposing power that would open up relations beyond those of the thinking or acting subject,” relations, in other words, that would come from out of a place of undoing, and thus defy any appeal to conceptuality or intentionality.⁶³ As a kind

⁶¹ Just as no reading of a text can translate to any other, “Fassbinder’s *Querelle* is and Genet’s *Querelle* do not translate each other; Fassbinder’s *Querelle* is no more merely a visualization of Genet than Genet’s *Querelle* is merely a script for Fassbinder, and it is precisely in that untranslatability that the erotic happens.” Haver, “Really Bad Infinities,” 12.

⁶² I take the distinction between paranoid and reparative reading from Sedgwick, as elaborated in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You,” in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 123–51.

⁶³ Drawing on Deleuze, Colebrook outlines a model of theory that would inquire into the conditions of possibility for, or the very “emergence of terms and relations.” She illustrates this model with a scene of reading drawn from Melville’s *Billy Budd* that, in her words, “force(s) an encounter with the Idea of reading,” where “Idea,” in this instance, denotes a pure force of differentiation that both actualizes and distinguishes each instance of reading. Following Claggart’s gaze as it traces, with pornographic attentiveness to detail, Billy Budd’s looks and demeanor, Colebrook can be said to identify that which, in its singularity, exceeds the visibly and conceptually articulated world. Colebrook’s reading informed my reading of Greenwell, since, arguably, she calls attention to the lure that, in

of looking-with, such a reading, perhaps, would be more accurately described as reading with.

“When I read with theorists, with art, with a colleague or a friend,” Berlant writes, “to read with is to cultivate a quality of attention to the disturbance of their alien epistemology, an experience of nonsovereignty that shakes my confidence in a way from which I have learned to derive pleasure, induce attachment, and maintain curiosity about the enigmas or insecurities that I can also barely stand or comprehend.”⁶⁴ Reading with the narrator as he reads with the world might similarly educate a reader to discover pleasures in and as the undoing of self that founds erotic sociality.

That being said, to read with the narrator in Greenwell’s novel is, perhaps, less a matter of confronting an “alien epistemology,” than one of experiencing the “disturbance” of thought, that is, the force of a movement that insistently calls into question the known, and exposes the limits of subjectivity. Unable to look away from the disappeared fly, the narrator nevertheless recognizes the perversity of caring for something so meaningless; moved to touch K’s body, he fails to ascertain any motive for his yearning other than touch itself; and, compelled to write a poem about a boy, he nevertheless acknowledges that he can not even remember, never mind write, without first committing an act of betrayal. Consistently, the narrator is drawn to do things that defy justification, as if to affirm the capacity of thought to confound every act. As Foucault writes of thought, so here does it seem to operate as “freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem.”⁶⁵ The narrator searchingly turns towards the reasons for his practices, but, thought through, looking, embracing, and writing are all disclosed as without ground, or, at any rate,

every scene of reading, at once draws a subject outside himself and brings him, despite his “best” intentions, in relation to another. Colebrook, “How Queer Can You Go?,” 194–200.

⁶⁴ Berlant and Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable*, 125.

⁶⁵ Michel Foucault, “Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York, NY: New Press, 1997), 117.

without any reason other than the sense that attends them.⁶⁶ Far from advancing anything as coherent or systematic as an epistemology, then, *What Belongs to You* might be said to offer something like an unbecoming epistemology; rather than a theory of knowledge, the narrator performatively presents a method for turning back on knowledge. In this sense, the narrator's thought models a kind of queer pedagogy, to the extent that such a pedagogy, as Ricco writes, "takes this crisis of knowledge production as its praxis," and "provokes attention to the very unease and uncertainty of what one thinks one knows."⁶⁷ Reading with the narrator in *What Belongs to You*, then, might offer training in how to engage the pleasures and risks of moving, again and again, towards the limits of thought, or of "what one thinks one knows."

But perhaps, beyond looking, touching, and writing, walking, as practiced by the narrator, most persuasively conveys the pedagogical potential of reading-with. When the narrator decides to take a walk, whether to explore his environs, to while away some time, or simply out of restlessness, he is often at his most unburdened, most selfless, or maybe most unburdened of self, at times even "drawn from myself, elated, struck stupidly good for a moment by the extravagant beauty of the world" (WB, 32), as if walking were all it took to become nothing but focus and attention, all receptivity and sense. Using his body as if it were "a stone one turns in one's hand, not for any purpose but for the feel of it" (WB, 177), he often rambles around with no destination in mind, following his body towards wherever it is drawn, while his thoughts, too, tumble forward, one falling after the other, likewise moving his mind towards wherever it happens to wander. Just as the narrator's thoughts touch the very edge of thinking, so his body consistently makes its way towards the outskirts of the city and other out-of-bounds places, like the tip of a

⁶⁶ As Haver writes of Foucault, "he also gave us a sense of the groundlessness of our practices, practices that are thereby first and last anarchic. And it is at this level – that is, at the level of the epistemological as such – that our practices are thoroughly political." Haver, "A Sense of the Common," 444.

⁶⁷ Ricco, *The Logic of the Lure*, 136.

pier whipped by bitter winds, a caged-in construction site for a half-built cathedral, and a vast no man's land that, unbeknownst to the narrator, lies just on the periphery of town. Certainly, walking so freely in this manner expresses a certain mode of being, a mode unavailable, for instance, to Mitko, who, being without a home, has forcibly been made into a perpetual wanderer. Nevertheless, reading-with might make for an analogous adventure in transgression without self-consciousness, or, at any rate, for a fine lesson in how to move, with the agility of thought, towards the attractions of no one destination.

Chapter 2

Being at a Loss:

Mourning, Translating, and Muteness in Anne Carson's *Nox*

Anne Carson's *Nox* comes as an accordion-bound book folded up in a dark grey box. The top of the box, and the front of the book both depict the same cropped black-and-white photograph of a boy. Wearing goggles, flippers, and a tight bathing suit, he stands, unsmiling, on a lawn, with his arms pressed tight to his side, and his goggle-masked gaze facing forward. On the underside of the box, Carson is quoted or quotes herself as saying, "When my brother died I made an epitaph for him in the form of a book. This is a replica of it, as close as we could get."¹ As a replica, *Nox* is made up of images from cover to cover; every page in the book pictures another. Some pages, much like top of the box and the cover of the book, feature photographs, most of which similarly appear to be fragments of larger images, snapshots cut or torn out of context and fashioned into various shapes and sizes. Others depict staples, hand-drawn marks, torn-up letters, smears of acrylic, smudges of ink, or slivers of photographic negatives, among other assorted materials. Most of the pages picture fragments of writing, all of which seem to have been printed on small pieces of paper. Bordered by torn edges, and alternately creased, crumpled, burned, soaked, or stained, these slips of paper each appear encrypted, as it were, within the image of any given replicated page. Several pages picture words that look as if they were etched into the pulp of the epitaph's pages. Smooth to the touch, but textured to the eye, the surface of *Nox* thus registers

¹ Referring to Carson's 2002 interview in *The Paris Review*'s "Art of Poetry" series, Corcoran notes that the original epitaph, which he describes as a "homemade scrapbook," predated *Nox* by more than a decade. Neil Corcoran, "A Brother Never Ends," *The Cambridge Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (2012): 375; Carson, *Nox*.

the material difference between the epitaph and its replica; both the pages and the cover of the replica convey the impossibility of sensing the very thing that they bring to view.

Nox, in this regard, attests to what cannot be sensed by virtue of the epitaph's replication. The replica shows that the epitaph is only visible as what can not be seen, or only tangible as what can not be touched; the epitaph appears withdrawn from sight and touch alike, entombed on every page. Certainly, based on a reading of *Nox*, one might compile a list of materials used in the epitaph's fabrication, as I have partially done above. One might also parse the content of Carson's writing, study her use of photographs, or analyze the relation between images and words in the epitaph. One might deduce, even further, that the epitaph was not itself accordion bound, for, in the replica, single staples appear to traverse the space that gapes between adjacent pages, and the traces of pages once seen through others now look like shadows without reason, each one separated from its source by a fold. *Nox* comes close enough to the original epitaph to preserve the content of the latter, as well as to communicate facts regarding its material composition. However, it equally makes the epitaph's absence palpable, or rather, presents the epitaph as a palpable absence – as what in the replica remains unseen or unread – as if to affirm, or perhaps to honor the irreplaceable thing that it is. *Nox* may be a mass-produced book, but, in this regard, it both registers and provokes an engagement with the singularity of the epitaph; the replica publicizes or circulates Carson's funerary inscription without, for all that, denying its uniqueness, or, correlatively, effacing the singularity of the loss that it marks.

The epitaph opens with a transcription of a Latin poem. Unattributed to any source, and titled only with the Roman numerals CI, the poem appears on a yellowed slip of paper that floats on the surface of the epitaph's page. The subsequent page pictures the first item in a series of Latin-English dictionary entries, entries that correspond to, and appear in the same order as the

words in the opening poem. On the following page, a sequence of numbered prose paragraphs begins. These paragraphs and the entries appear on interleaved pages, such that parts of the prose sequence often interrupt individual entries, and vice versa. At times, an entry or a paragraph is juxtaposed with a page that features another genre of written fragment, such as an aphorism or a quotation drawn from a letter, and, at other times, with a page that pictures one of the other materials included in the epitaph. In one of the paragraphs, Carson notes that the act or experience of seeing authorizes the work of the historian. “Autopsy is a term historians use of the ‘eyewitnessing’ of data or events by the historian himself, a mode of authorial power,” she writes, alluding, with the term “autopsy,” to a likeness between historian and pathologist, as if every event embodied evidence of how and why it came to pass.² On the basis of autopsy, she suggests, the historian can claim his observations as his own; the experience of his own eyes invests him with the authority to vouch for the truth or reality of what he sees or has seen. However, “to withhold this authorization is also powerful” (1.2), Carson notes, affirming a mode of power that would unseat the historian’s position as a source. With reference to Herodotus’ account of the funerary rites of the mythical phoenix – rites described at an earlier date by Hekataios – she specifies how a historian might write or speak while withholding authorization: “Herodotus carefully does not allege to have seen a phoenix, which comes only once every five hundred years, although he mentions the same legends as Hekataios. Herodotus liked to introduce such information with a word like λέγεται: ‘it is said,’ as one might use *on dit* or *dicitur*” (1.2). Words or phrases such as these, in other words, permit an anonymous form of citation. By opening with a word like the one for “it is said,” Herodotus can say something that both was and continues to be said by no one in particular. “To withhold [...] authorization,” then,

² Carson, *Nox*, section 1.2. Hereafter cited parenthetically. Since the book has no page numbers, I will cite by referring to the numerated paragraphs throughout.

is to say what no one source will have ever said, or to write what no one author will have ever written.³ Herodotus' gesture, in other words, vacates the place where the author might stand, and thereby attests to the place from which what is said is spoken; it affirms, as Foucault calls it, the "enunciative function," which by definition accommodates any number of individuals, each of whom, in the act of speaking, are put in relation to a possibility of speaking.⁴ If autopsy, or seeing with one's own eyes, expresses the power of the author, then practices that withhold authorization bear witness to a space from which one can speak without recourse to personal experience. If authorial power rests on sight as a condition for speech, then Herodotus' gesture attests to a mode of power founded on a non-relation between the seen and the said.

Nox both documents and stages a series of authorial withholdings. For instance, the replica itself brings each reader in relation to a possibility of speaking, or, more specifically, to the possibility of reading or re-citing something that remains unseen. *Nox* affirms, in this regard, that the reader withholds authorization in the scene of reading; the replica suggests that the act of reading itself attests to a capacity to speak from a place shared with anonymous others. The manner in which the text appears within the context of the epitaph, further, frames Carson's own writing as a collection of the said. Indeed, the frayed edges that limn the fragments of text in *Nox* cast Carson as one who can speak only by carrying or drawing her words onto the surface of each page from elsewhere. The book thus discloses a distance between the author and the words that she seems to present. With every page that features text – pages, I might add, that already

³ The gesture of withholding authorization might also be characterized as a mode of minimal or reticent assertion, as theorized by Anne-Lise François. By re-citing or presenting the said, the historian who withholds authorization might be said to "give notice of an unrealized x," which in this case would correspond to an unrealized potential to speak, "and, just as surely and swiftly, put it irretrievably 'off limits,' beyond development." To withhold authorization, in this light, would be to inoperatively present an unused or unfulfilled potential, a potential that remains withdrawn. François, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience*, 36–40.

⁴ Foucault also notes that the enunciative function operates "on the level of the 'it is said,'" which is to say, on the register of "'anyone who speaks,' but what he says is not said from anywhere." Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 93–98, 122.

picture Carson's hand at a remove, encrypted in every image – Carson figures herself as someone who stands outside the said, someone who writes only to remain, as it were, on the underside of meaning, on the dusty pages on which the fragments of text appear. Carson's authorial power, then, appears to rest on a decidedly non-authorial capacity to translate words from context to context, or, put differently, to recite and reframe words that were written in another place, and another time – words, then, of another, or the self-as-another. Finally, Carson's dictionary entries affirm the presence of the said on the level of content, for each entry attests both to the circulation of a word within the corpus of Latin literature, and to the possibility of translating that word from one language to another. The pages in *Nox* that picture Carson's writing show that she can only speak by carrying over the said from page to page; analogously, the entries demonstrate that she can make sense of the said only by virtue of a history of translation. With the entries, then, Carson not only affirms that the opening poem is itself composed with instances of the said, but also shows that each word in the poem, in turn, opens onto a multiplicity of meanings, or rather, onto an archive of possibilities of meaning, an archive that appears in each entry as a collection of translations. Each collection demonstrates, accordingly, that every word, as an instance of the said, marks a vacant place where meaning can emerge yet again.

Nox itself, the epitaph's fragments of text, and Carson's dictionary entries all resemble Herodotus' account of the phoenix' mourning ritual to the extent that they affirm a capacity to say, translate, or bring to view something that no one source can claim to have written, defined, or seen. Each of the pages of the epitaph show that Carson can present a history that unfolds in the absence of the author, which is to say, a history founded upon the recitation and translation of the said, as opposed to a history authorized by experience or observation. In this respect, the

epitaph traces a history that gestures towards Foucault's *historical a priori*, "an *a priori* not of truths that might never be said, or really given to experience; but the *a priori* of a history that is given, since it is that of things actually said."⁵ Every time Carson presents herself in relation to the said, she pictures herself as but one figure among innumerable others who might come to occupy, or rather co-exist in the historically determined space from which the said is spoken, or rather, following Foucault, in an archive that demarcates the conditions of the sayable or presentable.⁶ As opposed to reaffirming authorial power, which expresses a potential to make sense on the grounds of sight, *Nox* thus attests to a power that opens the possibility to sense, at the interstices of the seen and the said, the place from which anyone might speak within the constraints of the possible, or, more precisely, the space in which manifold possibilities of speech – possibilities that are always historical – exist as such, untethered to any origin. In what follows, I hope to show that the book both documents and dramatizes an experience of this space. However, far from affirming the capacity to give voice to this experience – far from valorizing the wealth of possibilities onto which the archive opens – Carson, withholding authorization at every turn, makes use of language and images throughout the epitaph to attest to the singularity of that which remains in the shadows of the sayable and the visible alike. *Nox* thus opens onto an experience that remains beyond the archive, and offers it to be read as such.

The material form of *Nox* illustrates the structure of such an experience. As noted above, every page in *Nox*, as an instance of the said, attests to a possibility of speaking. As the place where the replica unfolds, a place, importantly, that conforms to the contours the book, the box

⁵ In other words, a history that is "given" in the form of the said, whether the latter is embodied in a fragment of text, a word, or a photograph, attests to a *historical a priori*. Foucault, 127.

⁶ Foucault's words on the archive bear repeating: "...It is not possible for us to describe our own archive, since it is from within these rules that we speak, since it is that which gives to what we can say – and to itself, the object of our discourse – its modes of appearance, its forms of existence and coexistence, its system of accumulation, historicity, and disappearance." Foucault, 130.

arguably figures this potential for speech, which, as such, exists just outside the said. Separated from its contents, however, the box opens onto a hollow in which nothing appears to take place, a void that suggests that the possibility of not-speaking, and the possibility of not-seeing, necessarily accompanies the potential to speak or to see. The box, emptied out, figures “the possibility that language does not exist, does not take place – or, better, that it takes place only through its possibility of not being there, its contingency,” as Agamben writes on the substance of the speaking subject.⁷ Like every page of the epitaph, the form of *Nox* itself shows that Carson can speak only by virtue of a power to say nothing at all, that is, by virtue of a capacity to occupy the time and place from which the said unfolds, suggesting that the space inside the box, rather than the words and images in the book, most truly embodies her existence. The name “Anne Carson,” which looms large in capital letters on the side of the box as per the publisher’s conventions, only reaffirms that what is said in the name of the author equally opens onto a space that exceeds the sayable, a space about which there is nothing to say.

On the level of form, then, *Nox* suggests that the place from which anyone speaks exists as an incapacity of speech, or rather, as a form of muteness. For Carson, muteness names an impersonal mode of existence, an “it” that nevertheless belongs to each individual who bears it:

Note that the word ‘mute’ (from the Latin *mutus* and the Greek μῦειν) is regarded by linguists as an onomatopoeic formation referring not to silence but to a certain fundamental opacity of human being, which likes to show the truth by allowing it to be seen hiding. [...] In a cigarette-smoke-soaked Copenhagen, under a wide thin sorrowful sky, as swans drift down the water, I am looking a long time into the muteness of my brother. It resists me. (1.3)

Muteness, Carson affirms, is less a matter of silence, than of visibility. Here, she locates her brother’s opacity in the midst of her environment, or, more precisely, between herself and her surroundings, or between her vision and the visible, as if it were a dark lens through which she

⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1999), 146.

can somehow still perceive the air, the sky, and the swans on the water. Later, she situates muteness inside the act of translating. After identifying the poem that opens the epitaph as an elegy composed by Catullus for his own brother, she writes,

I never arrived at the translation I would have liked to do of poem 101. But over the years of working at it, I came to think of translating as a room, not exactly an unknown room, where one gropes for the light switch. I guess it never ends. A brother never ends. I prowl him. He does not end. (7.1)

When Carson translates, she comes to share her brother's incapacity to speak, as though all possibilities of speaking had failed her in the act of translating itself. Indeed, the practice detains her in a room without light, sentencing her to feel forever for a way out of muteness. As depicted by Carson, translating no longer tends towards interpretation or the production of meaning, but rather opens up as a space where words are nowhere in sight. Neither known nor unknown, but "not exactly [...] unknown," the room therefore affirms the existence of a place outside the order of knowledge, a space of unknowing that offers the experience of both the possibility and impossibility of speaking.⁸ For, as Carson goes on to say, "in one sense it is a room I can never leave, perhaps dreadful for that. At the same time, a place composed entirely of entries" (7.1). Fumbling for words and enduring speechlessness, Carson comes to realize that if entries for words are doors to meaning, they equally offer access to the room. Translating may bring about sense, but, she intimates, it also endlessly opens onto obscurity.⁹

As a space where movement takes place, rather than a movement that takes place in or across a space, translating here differs from the activity of the historian, which Carson likens to

⁸ Carson's account of translating as a dark room also attests to the fact, as Agamben notes, that the possibility of seeing involves the possibility of not-seeing, for "human being can [...] see shadows (*to skotos*), they can experience darkness: they have the potential not to see, the *possibility of privation*." Agamben, "On Potentiality," 181.

⁹ Following Jean-Luc Nancy, we might say that every entry for a word "offers access: sense itself, which is not the access that accedes to nothing, but the access that infinitely accedes, even further forward into the night/day [...] Access is no longer of the order of vision, but of the touch," or rather, of groping for meaning in unlit places. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 82.

the mourning ritual of the mythical phoenix, as described by Hekataios. The phoenix, it is said, makes an egg in which to carry the body of his father toward the temple of the sun. Carson claims that historical inquiry, similarly, traffics in the remains of the dead, for “it is when you are asking about something that you realize you yourself have survived it, and so you must carry it, or fashion it into a thing that carries itself” (1.1). Like the phoenix’ mourning ritual, asking imposes upon the historian the task of conveying, or devising the means to convey the outlived towards the light; however, for the inquiring historian, the matter of inquiry itself embodies what remains of the dead. By aligning the work of mourning and asking, Carson implies that the historian, like the phoenix, can only carry what is outlived by first entombing it in something forged from materials at hand – something, say, like a word, a saying, or an image, rather than an egg made of foraged myrrh. Given that the phoenix carries himself towards the light only with the body of the dead by his side, Carson’s description of the historian’s task further suggests that “a thing that carries itself,” which is to say, a thing that presents itself to view, must similarly bear the outlived matter of inquiry, and thus obscure the very matter out of which it is made. Quoting Herodotos, Carson writes that the Skythians, for instance, fashioned a bowl out of each Skythian’s arrowheads in order to convey the size of their population. “Herodotos tells us the king made this bowl in order to leave behind a ‘memory’ (μνημόσυνον) or a ‘monument’ of the number,” she remarks, before adding, “The number itself who knows” (1.3). The number itself remains a question, even as the Skythian’s bowl, carrying itself towards the light, appears as its monument. “History,” Carson concludes, “can be at once concrete and indecipherable” (1.3).

Neither phoenix nor historian, then, attends to the obscure existence of the outlived, or rather, they attend to it only insofar as it marks the start of their labour: they both put the dead in its place in order to get on with their work; both consign the bodies of the outlived to a separate,

seemingly inaccessible space in order to accomplish or bring to light something of value.¹⁰ As presented in *Nox*, the historian and the phoenix alike would be done with the very bodies they bear, the bodies whose passing first motivated their flights forward. Carson notes, however, that the phoenix might very well come to sense that his ritual work is contingent upon something that runs counter to his flight:

The phoenix mourns by shaping, weighing, testing, hollowing, plugging and carrying towards the light. He seems to take a clear view of necessity. And in the shadows that flash over him as he makes his way from Arabia to Egypt maybe he comes to see the immensity of the mechanism in which he is caught, the immense fragility of his own flying – composed as it is of these ceaselessly passing shadows carried backward by the very motion that devours them, his motion, his asking. (1.1)

Working with an end in sight and a destination in mind, the phoenix does not see that his asking unfolds within a mechanism that necessitates not only a passage towards the light, but also the untoward movement of shadows. Cast by nothing, that is, by the (non-)substance of nothing – an unimaginable thing – these fugitive shadows, Carson suggests, trace time as it passes, or rather, figure each moment as it is consumed, spent, or outlived as the phoenix moves onward.¹¹ As the medium or matter of the phoenix’ flying – “composed as it is of these ceaselessly passing shadows” – these passing moments will have never been assimilated or recuperated by his work;

¹⁰ In this sense, Carson’s use of the phoenix’ mourning ritual as metaphor for historical inquiry resonates not only with the archival logic deconstructed by Derrida and further critiqued by Agamben, as discussed in Chapter 1, but also with Derrida’s theorization of mourning as an effort to “ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by *identifying* the bodily remains and by *localizing* the dead [...] One has to know. *One has to know it. One has to have knowledge* [Il faut le savoir]. Now to know is to know *who* and *where*, to know whose body it really is and what place it occupies – for it must stay in its place [...] Let him stay there and move no more!” Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994), 9; Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 1996, 3, 11.

¹¹ Carson similarly speaks of shadows “cast by nothing” in one of the chapbooks that compose her collection *Float*. The following remarks guided my reading of this passage: “As a classicist I was trained to strive for exactness and to believe that rigorous knowledge of the world without any residue is possible for us. This residue, which does not exist – just to think of it refreshes me. To think of its position, how it shares its position with drenched layers of nothing, to think of its motion, how it can never stop moving because I am in motion with it, to think of its shadow, which is cast by nothing and so has no death in it (or very little) – to think of these things gives me a sensation of getting free.” I take the shadow above to have “no death in it,” by virtue of the fact that it is precisely the shadow of death. Anne Carson, “Variations on the Right to Remain Silent,” in *Float* (Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart, 2016).

“carried backward,” they will have never been said, seen, or known, whether in the form of a name, a bowl, or otherwise. The shadows that “flash over” the phoenix therefore embody an absolute loss that infinitely comes to pass, a loss so inexhaustible that it might be described, following Derrida on Bataille, as an “expenditure without reserve,” that is, an expenditure that “can no longer be determined as negativity in a process or a system,” or, in Carson’s terms, in a mechanism that labours to incorporate or give meaning to the outlived, to carry the dead to light.¹² Looking towards the shadows, then, the phoenix or the historian might come to see that which surpasses the work of mourning or inquiry, and, accordingly, exceeds any one answer or end. To reckon with the passing of these shadows, Carson’s imagery implies, would be to sense that someone remains to be mourned, that a question remains to be solved, or that something remains to be translated.

Like the mourning phoenix, Carson aims for light when she translates Catullus’ elegy, but rather than attaining her desired goal, she only ever lands in the dark. In contrast to the work of mourning or asking, which unfolds across a vast expanse, translating, in this instance, traverses nothing, and goes nowhere; far from being a forward movement in time, the practice takes place as a space outside of time, or, any rate, outside the time mapped out by the flight of the phoenix, the time of work and history.¹³ Always already reaching for the light, the body that occupies this space similarly seems stuck in place, destined only to begin groping again with no

¹² In a manner that resonates with my reading of Carson’s imagery, Derrida writes that this expenditure “can no longer be called negative precisely because it has no reserved underside, because it can no longer permit itself to be converted into positivity, because it can no longer *collaborate* with the continuous linking-up of meaning, concept, time and truth in discourse; because it literally can no longer *labor* and let itself be interrogated as the ‘work of the negative.’” Jacques Derrida, “From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 259–60.

¹³ This time is comparable to the time that Blanchot calls “empty, dead time,” which is “a real time in which death is present – in which death happens but doesn’t stop happening [...] The dead present is the impossibility of making any presence real – an impossibility which is present, which is there as the present’s double, the shadow of the present in which the present bears and hides in itself.” Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* (Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska Press, 1955), 30–31.

end, as though, in the act of translating, Carson's body were itself delivered to the hollow in which the phoenix lays the dead, consigned to the very place where the historian's matter of inquiry remains unseen. Indeed, the resonance between Carson's metaphors for translating, mourning, and asking suggests that the former forces Carson to turn away from the outcome of her labour and attend to how the act itself, that is, the dark experience of the room, affects her body. Losing sight of the light that promises resolution, Carson thus gains a sense of her body as it is outlived in the act of translating, which is to say, as a muteness that must be carried, as a potential to not-speak and not-see that must be seen through.¹⁴ Outlived and obscured, the body that Carson bears will have never presented itself to view, or rather, will have never ceased grasping for the meaning that would illumine its place. From the perspective of the room, words, Carson suggests, can only appear as monuments to or memories of such an experience, for, much like the opacity of Carson's brother, and the shadows carried backward by virtue of the phoenix' flight, the body that ceaselessly gropes in the room will have always resisted the work that would draw it to light. Forever distending the time of translating from within, it exists only to endlessly endure its muteness.¹⁵

Translating Catullus 101 thus provokes Carson to sense the untranslatable or the unsayable, for the practice confines her body to a space that remains outside the work of meaning, a space that she comes to share with outlived others. As *Nox* unfolds and entries for Catullus' elegy accumulate, the epitaph itself illustrates the manner in which translating, far from

¹⁴ In "Seated Figure with Red Angle (1988)," a poem composed entirely of conditional phrases, Carson alludes to the strange existence of this obscure body: "If buried all but traceless in the dark in its energy sitting, drifting within your own is another body." For a reading of Carson's poem that aligns with my purposes here, see Tschofen, who argues that the poem offers "a new image *of thought*, an image of that which cannot be *pictured*." Anne Carson, "'Seated Figure with Red Angle (1988)' by Betty Goodwin," in *Decreation* (Toronto, ON: Vintage Canada, 2006), 97; Tschofen, "Drawing Out a New Image of Thought: Anne Carson's Radical Ekphrasis."

¹⁵ The endlessness of translating, as presented in *Nox*, thus seems to align with Nancy's description of "the endlessness of technology" or "*tekne*," the former of which, he writes, is "the infinite of art that supplements a nature that never took place and will never take place." Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, 41.

finally conveying the sense of one language into another, takes place only insofar as it opens onto an experience of muteness, an experience that insistently interrupts or indefinitely suspends the translator's labour. Carson brings out this movement by offering a full translation of Catullus' poem 101 three quarters of the way through the epitaph (Fig. 1), only to show, several pages thereafter, the very same translation torn to pieces, overprinted on shredded strips of paper and partially obscured with heavy, dark marks (Fig. 2). The image of Carson's translation in tatters at once evokes her dissatisfaction with the outcome of her labour, and suggests that each attempt at translating the elegy will have inevitably drawn her back to the silence of the blank page. Infinitely frustrated by Carson's incapacity to work her way out of the room, translating, as presented here, makes sense only to confront the translator with a verbal surface on the verge of senselessness. As the epitaph progresses, the dictionary entries, similarly, lead towards neither clarity nor legibility, but rather towards an image of Carson's translation fading or flowing away into nothingness, as though Carson's experience of the room also moved her to call into question every translation no sooner than it had been made. Soaked, stained yellow, and singed along the edges, this copy of her translation appears on the inside back cover of *Nox*, its surface abur with blotted ink and smeared lines of verse. Placed just at the close of the book, this image not only presents signification as an untenable end, but also registers the exhaustion, or, perhaps more aptly, the dissolution of meaning that takes place in the act of translating itself, as though the translated text, barely discernable, figured the translator's disappeared body. Here, the epitaph demonstrates that translating works towards meaning only to trace a return to non-meaning, much like, as Barthes claims, "writing ceaselessly posits meaning to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning."¹⁶ If Carson's body comes to be detained in the opacity of the room, each of her translations, similarly, comes to expose the mute underside of language.

¹⁶ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image - Music - Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York, NY: Hill

Nox shows, then, that Catullus' poem 101 keeps Carson reaching for more than any translation can offer, or rather, for more than any of the meanings that she can give to Catullus' words, forcing her to turn back to the room in which her body, unseen and unspoken for, remains at a loss of language. To the extent that Carson, translating the elegy, comes to experience a space that exceeds the translator's labour, her relation to the poem bears a certain resemblance to Barthes' relation to photography. In Part II of *Camera Lucida*, he too writes of an experience that escapes the movement of dialectical thought, which is to say, that movement which recuperates loss in the service of presence or the production of meaning.¹⁷ Gazing at an old photograph of his recently deceased mother, Barthes find himself at a standstill, arrested by a loss that no labour can work through, a loss that therefore leaves him without the capacity for speech.¹⁸ The photograph, Barthes notes, is a "lost, remote photograph, one that does not look 'like her,' the photograph of a child I never knew," standing with her brother in an indoor garden.¹⁹ The affective impact of the image, however, incites him to look beyond the visible, which offers but a "vague, faded" face to his gaze, and inquire into how his mother's photograph could have possibly moved him so.²⁰ Reflecting upon his response to the image, he affirms that the "Winter Garden Photograph," as he calls it, "contained more than what the technical being of photography can reasonably offer," for it "collected all the possible predicates from which my mother's being was constituted."²¹ The Winter Garden Photograph, in other words, captured more than his mother's likeness, for it disclosed her in and as all possibilities of her being; the

and Wang, 1977), 147.

¹⁷ Barthes defines dialectical thought as "that thought which masters the corruptible and converts the negation of death into the power to work." Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 90.

¹⁸ "It is said that mourning, by its gradual labor, slowly erases pain; I could not, I cannot believe this; because for me, Time eliminates the emotion of loss (I do not weep), that is all. For the rest, everything has remained motionless." Barthes, 75.

¹⁹ Barthes, 103.

²⁰ Barthes, 99.

²¹ Barthes, 70.

photograph presented more than her identifying properties, for it opened onto her singular way of being simply and completely how she was.²² Faced with the full quality of his mother's existence, a plenitude to which, Barthes writes, "nothing can be added," he finds himself struck silent, a silence that attests to the manner in which the Winter Garden Photograph had itself exhausted all possibilities of speaking about the very thing it offers to view. Pained by his desire to speak what the photograph shows – to express the loss that the photograph impresses upon him – Barthes goes on to declare, "The horror is this: nothing to say about the death of one whom I love most, nothing to say about her photograph, which I contemplate without ever being able to get to the heart of it, to transform it."²³ Insofar as the photograph moves Barthes to sense his mother's very being, he can learn nothing from it, and make nothing of it other than the fact of her having been, a truth that eludes both the work of meaning and the work of mourning.²⁴

Rather than provoking Barthes to fall in with the movement of the dialectic, then, the Winter Garden Photograph rouses him to trace, with his gaze, "a strictly revulsive movement which reverses the course of the thing," a movement that leads the thing back, as it were, from appearance, and towards the place that marks its existence, thereby opening the possibility of sensing the manner in which the photographed body comes to pass.²⁵ The Winter Garden Photograph thus sentences Barthes to grief. Just as Carson, translating Catullus elegy, can find

²² We might say that Barthes happens upon the very being of a loved one in The Winter Garden Photograph, if, following Agamben, "Love is never directed towards this or that property of the loved one (being blond, being small, being tender, being lame), but neither does it neglect the properties in favor of an insipid generality (universal love): The lover wants to loved one *with all of its predicates*, its being such as it is." Barthes, 63–71, 109–10; Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 2.

²³ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 93.

²⁴ Barthes, 99–100, 106–7.

²⁵ I take it that the photographed body's place of existence corresponds to what Barthes describes as "this place which extends between infinity and the subject," the place where the seen "has been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred." This movement also aligns with the affective force of the *punctum*, as theorized by John Paul Ricco, who writes that "the *punctum* is the opening up of a space around the image, which neither lies entirely outside of the image-field nor is wholly the domain of the viewing subject, but more precisely is the *mise-en-scène* of their coexistence – affective spacing and animating force between them." Barthes, 77, 119; Ricco, *The Decision Between Us: Art and Ethics in the Time of Scenes*, 140–42.

neither satisfaction nor respite from her experience of the room, so Barthes, transfixed by his mother's photograph, can find neither solace nor relief from his impression of the image, that is, from the affective impact of his mother having existed just as she, and only she, had. As he says, finding himself alone with the photograph, "I cannot transform my grief, I cannot let my gaze drift; no culture will help me utter this suffering which I experience entirely on the level of the image's finitude."²⁶ Equally incapable of averting his eyes from the photograph, and of putting his sense of the image into words, Barthes finds himself at an impasse between seeing and speaking, as though his body, in the act of looking rather than translating, were similarly delivered to a space without light, abandoned, like Carson's, to the space where outlived bodies suffer a common incapacity to speak.²⁷ Try as he might, Barthes can do nothing but submit to the full force of his mother's loss, for, "on the level of the image's finitude," the photographed body shows itself only to be withdrawn, or, more precisely, shows itself as withdrawn with every passing moment – "here, and yet immediately separated; [...] absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred."²⁸ As evidence of his mother's existence, and thus evidence of her passing, the Winter Garden Photograph insistently confronts Barthes with the truth or reality of what-has been, leaving him absolutely bereft, with the power to speak only of the speechlessness that comes with such a loss, or, as he goes on to write, "to speak of the 'nothing to say.'"²⁹

Barthes' reflections on his experience of the Winter Garden Photograph resonate with Carson's remarks on one of the photographs in *Nox* – the only photograph, in fact, that she addresses throughout the book, as if she wished to reaffirm, through silence, the gap between what has been, and what can be said of it. The photograph (Fig. 3) pictures her brother as a child,

²⁶ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 90.

²⁷ Barthes, 99.

²⁸ Barthes, 77.

²⁹ Barthes, 93; Ricco, *The Decision Between Us: Art and Ethics in the Time of Scenes*, 139.

standing beneath a treehouse occupied by three older boys. Caught from a distance and in the sun's glare, her brother's features are barely visible in the picture. Nevertheless, Carson can still see, in his "sideways invisible look," the simple fact that "no one knew him" (8.2). In Carson's eyes, her brother's look discloses a truth that consists entirely of his opacity, a truth, she suggests, that had accompanied him from his childhood roughhousing with older boys, through his adulthood wandering from continent to continent. "When he began dealing drugs, I got the old sinking feeling – not for the criminality of it, not for the danger, but that look," Carson writes, as though, despite the passage of years, her brother's look still lingered in his behavior, and, with that look, the feeling of how his actions "puzzled me from the beginning, it made my heart sink" (8.2). Carson's response to her brother's look thus suggests that his photograph, much like Barthes' Winter Garden Photograph, communicates the impossibility of knowing the very being that it brings to view, an impossibility in which the truth of her brother lies.

Barthes' response to the Winter Garden Photograph, which, as he writes "cannot *say* what it lets us see," also offers insight into Carson's relation to the muteness of outlived bodies, or, in her words, to the "fundamental opacity of human being, which likes to show the truth by allowing it to be seen hiding."³⁰ In the first of the prose paragraphs in the epitaph, for instance, she writes of the impact of death on thought in a manner that resonates with Barthes' theory of photography. She says,

I wanted to fill my elegy with light of all kinds. But death makes us stingy. There is nothing more to be expended on that, we think, he's dead. Love cannot alter it. Words cannot add to it. No matter how I try to evoke the starry lad he was, it remains a plain, odd history. So I began to think about history. (1.0)

Just as the Winter Garden Photograph denies Barthes the capacity to make use of the evidence that it forces him to bear, the death of Carson's brother deprives her of the power to speak of his

³⁰ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 100.

mode of being. Composing an elegy with various forms of light, Carson suggests, would make for a useless expenditure, for nothing – no word, no image, and no book – will have ever drawn him out of the obscurity, or, as she writes later, the “overtakelessness” (1.3) that defines his existence. For all that she might try to speak of how her brother was, her words will have always come up against his muteness, forcing her to sense that which remains unsurpassable, infinitely exceeds the intelligible, and, in her words, “cannot be got round. Cannot be avoided or seen to the back of” (1.3).³¹ If, as Carson intimates, both love and words are superfluous in the face of her brother’s passing, then, like Barthes’ photograph of his mother, loss must move her to sense that her brother exists as a plenitude that accepts no substitute, as a fullness of being – or rather, of non-being – that withstands the production of meaning only to the extent that it remains perfectly as it is, in excess of all that might come to appear. Carson thus begins to think about history with a certain understanding of that which historical labour will have never recouped; the truth of her brother’s being, she affirms, falls outside the system that would put loss to work in the service of knowledge.

Translating Catullus’ poem 101, Carson similarly comes to sense a fullness of being that, as such, remains unsayable. Elaborating on the difficulty of translating the poem, Carson writes, “Nothing in English can capture the passionate, slow surface of a Roman elegy,” implying that each of her countless attempts at translation is defied by a certain quality of surface, rather than by signification *per se*. The elegy seems to provoke Carson to sense that a verbal surface opens onto more than the meaning borne by the words that constitute it, just as the Winter Garden Photograph moves Barthes to perceive that a visual surface discloses a truth that surpasses the

³¹ Carson appeals to Heidegger’s sense of *das Unumgängliche* to define overtakelessness. She may also be alluding to Emily Dickinson, who writes, in poem 1691, of “The overtakelessness of those / Who have accomplished Death.” Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston, MA: Little Brown and Co., 1955), 690.

“codes” by which images come to be read.³² Ever-unyielding to interpretation, the photograph’s surface brings Barthes’ gaze in contact with “the body of the photographed thing,” only to submit him to the affective force of an existence that will have always eluded the power to speak.³³ Confronted with the surface of the elegy, Carson likewise expresses the impossibility of translating the manner in which the poem at once affects her, and offers itself to be sensed. To translate the elegy, she affirms, would be to lose the quality of the text’s surface, or rather, to transform the manner in which the text exists as a surface, regardless of whether or not the translation ended up conveying the content of the poem. Carson tellingly describes this surface in terms more suggestive of music or dance than the printed word, as if reading the poem were comparable to listening to how a body “plays” the text, or attending to how the elegy’s surface moves and is moved by a body. Carson’s description, then, intimates that nothing in English can translate how the elegy unfolds in time, which is to say, how the text comes to affect the body in the act of reading or translating. The muteness of the translator’s outlived body, then, follows from the sensuous impact of language; just as the photograph discloses a quality of being that leaves Barthes with nothing to say, so the elegy’s verbal surface comes to pass, for Carson, with a slow passion that brings her to sense the limits of language.

Carson goes on to affirm that Catullus’ manner of speaking thwarts her every attempt at translation in similar manner, that is, by virtue of a certain quality, or a certain affective impression. “No one (even in Latin) can approximate Catullan diction, which at its most sorrowful has an air of deep festivity, like one of those trees that turns all its leaves over, silver, in the wind” (7.1), she writes, suggesting that no translator will have ever found the words (even in Latin) to capture the deeply festive air that Catullan diction has about it. “Like one of those

³² Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 88.

³³ Barthes, 81, 106.

trees,” the poet’s vocabulary manifests something that remains resistant to both language and interpretation, something as “inexpressible” and “unanalyzable” as what Barthes similarly calls the “air” of a face. The air, Barthes writes, accompanies the photographed body as “a kind of intractable supplement of identity”; the air of a person exceeds predication, for it corresponds to the manner in which a being exists, which is to say, the manner in which a body comes to appear with each passing moment, carrying the full force of what-has been.³⁴ In the Winter Garden Photograph, Barthes notes, “this air was the person I used to see, consubstantial with her face,” affirming that his mother’s face, as presented in the photograph, at once embodies and radiates a reality beyond likeness, a truth irreducible to representation, or, as he suggests, a value – or, perhaps, “a life value” – distinct from identity.³⁵ In Catullus’ vocabulary, Carson similarly appears to sense a value that lies outside the economy of exchange and equivalencies that governs systems of meaning, a value that thereby defies the work of the translator. It is telling, in this regard, that Carson uses a simile to evoke the air that she finds herself incapable of conjuring with translated words. For simile, as such, attests to a metonymic, rather than a metaphoric power. Rather than meaning or a model, a common quality of air, that is, a certain modality of being links the terms of Carson’s simile; ever intractable, the air simultaneously emanates from and suffuses both the sayable and the visible, remaining at once distinct and inseparable from Catullan diction and “one of those trees” alike. The simile suggests, then, that to illustrate the air of a thing is to expose the air, as insubstantial as it is, as that which grounds the relation between similitudes, or, better yet, as that which unleashes and unfolds as a chain of similitudes, a chain bound by a common quality of existence. “Like like like like like” (3.3), Carson etches into one of the pages in *Nox*, as if to write a formula for the logic of the intractable supplement;

³⁴ Barthes, 98, 109.

³⁵ Barthes, 107–10.

untranslatable and irreplaceable, the air exists only in and as the shared space, or rather, the space of relation between similitudes, and thus remains, as Barthes says, “outside of ‘likeness.’”³⁶ Translating and looking, respectively, Carson and Barthes therefore each come into contact with a facet of experience that lies outside of the sayable and the visible, in the shadow of text and image alike. Just as the Winter Garden Photograph rouses Barthes to see more than the visible, so Catullan diction moves Carson to engage more than the legible. For Carson, Catullus’ body of work appears to manifest an air to be read, but never grasped in its singularity; a quality to be translated, but only insofar as it appears, each time, as an impossibility of speaking and seeing, or rather, as nothing but the space of relation between bodies.

Translating, then, orients Carson towards the verbal surface of language, a surface that constitutively attests to a possibility of speaking, only to confront her with what will have never been said, that is, with the sensuous impact of any given surface as it unfolds, and the singular air irradiated by a certain manner of speaking.³⁷ Accordingly, the body that is outlived in the act of translating arguably figures the translator’s incapacity to represent her sense of how language comes to affect her as she handles the stuff of its making. To experience muteness, in other words, is to rub up against the surface of language, a surface comparable to Barthes’ photograph insofar as it too forces the body to register a sense that can not be put into words. And, as with Barthes, whose grief, or relation to loss, keeps him yearning to speak the truth that his mother’s photograph lets him see, or, in his words, “to know, and to be able to say adequately – why, in what she consists” – a desire, arguably, that generates the reflections that compose *Camera*

³⁶ Barthes, 109.

³⁷ I take the word “irradiate” from Derrida, who, writing on Barthes, uses it to describe the force of the *punctum* as it “invades” the field of the image, that is, “the *studium*, to which, strictly speaking, it does not belong.” My reading of Carson’s sense of “air” is indebted to Derrida’s reading of the *punctum* as a singularity that “lends itself to metonymy.” He elaborates upon the manner in which the irreplaceable irradiates: “as soon as it allows itself to be drawn into a network of substitutions, it can invade everything, objects as well as affects. This singularity that is nowhere *in* the field mobilizes everything everywhere; it pluralizes itself.” Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 43, 57.

Lucida – Carson’s sense of muteness, far from discouraging her practice, in fact keeps her hunting for a translation that would illumine the intractable quality that Catullus’ elegy lets her read.³⁸ To put it differently, the translator’s relation to the room keeps her on the prowl:

Prowling the meanings of a word, prowling the history of a person, no use expecting a flood of light. Human words have no main switch. But all those little kidnaps in the dark. And then the luminous, big, shivering, discandied, unrepentant, barking web of them that hangs in your mind when you turn back to the page you were trying to translate. (7.1)

In the act of translating, Carson’s outlived body, forcibly deprived of the potential to see and speak, can do nothing but ceaselessly grope. The very opacity that engulfs and incapacitates the translator’s body, however, also drives Carson, with an insatiable hunger, to keep prowling for meanings and history, even in light of the noisy web of words so readily at hand. Here, the room that is translating seems to open up as the space of relation between every word and each of its meanings, between every person and each trace of their past. Ever-obscure, this space not only constitutes the condition of possibility for seizing upon fragments of knowledge, but also empowers Carson to lurk in the shadows of language and history unseen and unheard, forever tempted by the prospect of happening upon ever more translations, even as she herself acknowledges that no meaning will have ever grasped the intractable sense of a word, or, as she puts it, that “human words have no main switch.” The shift from groping to prowling, then, suggests that the translator has come to terms with her muteness, both in the sense that the activity of prowling affirms the unlit space occupied by outlived bodies as the means to seek out meanings, or, literally, to “come to terms,” and in the sense that the translator’s continued pursuit of translations attests to the fact that something always remains to be sensed on the dark side of language, that is, beyond the said, no matter how radiant the corpus of the latter may be.³⁹

³⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 109.

³⁹ One also might read, in the figure that gropes and prowls in turn, the subject who engages both the “text of pleasure,” and “the text of bliss,” as theorized by Barthes, for groping corresponds to the “state of loss” that Barthes

Carson can make sense of Catullus' words, then, only insofar as she works with the darkness that comes between each word and its meanings; prowling, she moves through or translates from within a space that simultaneously binds her to meaning and history, and brings her in contact with the body that is outlived in the act of translating, a space that therefore opens the possibility of sensing the gap between the sensuous impact of the surface of language, and what can be said or known. Over the course of *Nox*, the lexical entries for Catullus' elegy make the translator's experience of this space palpable. On the one hand, the entries appear to figure, in Carson's terms, the luminous, barking web of words that "hangs in your mind when you turn back to the page you were trying to translate" – a page not unlike the page that opens the epitaph, to which the reader can similarly turn back with the memory of the entries that follow.⁴⁰ In this respect, each entry, as discussed earlier, attests to an archive of possibilities of speaking, and, accordingly, every entry, with its wealth of meanings, further expands the translator's field of possibilities, multiplying what can be said with Catullus' words. On the other hand, the entries also invite the reader to follow in the translator's footsteps as she furtively moves towards her prey, prowling for meaning after meaning, weaving through the definitions collected in each entry. From the perspective of this space, that is, from inside this scene or space of relation, meanings can not accumulate, but only vanish into the night no sooner than they are caught; the translator's sense of the room guarantees that each of these "little kidnaps in the dark," as Carson puts it, offers little more than a surface to be sensed in passing, and, accordingly, that nothing but further pursuit can follow from the pursuit of meanings. Touching upon translation after

associates with the latter, and prowling is defined in relation to the stuff of culture. Translating, Carson thus resembles "the subject who keeps the two texts in his field and in his hands the reins of pleasure and bliss [...] for (she) simultaneously and contradictorily participates in the profound hedonism of all culture [...] and in the destruction of that culture." Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (NY, New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 14.

⁴⁰ Stang, "'Nox,' or the Muteness of Things." Stang also notes that the entries consist of "an attempt to put on paper this luminous web." Each of the entries, he adds, is "a point of opening in which the translator is not so much looking for the *mot juste* as *le mot muet*."

translation, whoever comes to prowl the space onto which the entries open might come to realize, as Jean-Luc Nancy writes of sense, that “you have to feel it go by, and doubtless we must even assert: sense is precisely that: the fact of feeling it go by, and of feeling itself going from one to the other (from one person to the other as well as from one sense to another).”⁴¹ Rather than re-affirming the potential to speak, then, the activity of prowling attests to the potential to experience the dark side of the said, that is, the space where the body that is outlived in the act of translating remains unseen and unspoken for. The entries in *Nox*, therefore, open onto a place that not only lies outside the luminous web of language, but also remains absolutely excluded from the possibilities of speaking to which the latter attest. To prowl the translations collected in each of the entries in *Nox*, therefore, is to sense a body, to quote Nancy, that “makes sense beyond sense” with every passing moment, a body that reading and translating alike happen to bring into contact with the surface of language.⁴²

The sequence of prose paragraphs in *Nox* similarly suggests that Carson remains excluded from the history that she simultaneously presents as her own, as if to affirm that a person, like “human words,” harbors an opacity that forever exceeds the facts of their past, facts that can be prowled like meanings in an infinite scene or space of relation.⁴³ As discussed, *Nox* figures Carson’s exclusion from her history on the level of form: first, in the writer’s relation to each fragment of text in the epitaph; and second, in the authors’ relation to each page in the book, both of which locate Carson on the underside of the said. On the level of content, the book similarly conveys Carson’s exteriority from her own words and deeds – arguably the very stuff

⁴¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, “An Exempting from Sense,” in *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2009), 127.

⁴² Nancy, 126.

⁴³ As Carson puts it “there is something that facts lack,” an “overtakelessness,” which “cannot be got round. Cannot be avoided or seen to the back of. And about which one collects facts – it remains beyond them”(1.3). I borrow the term “infinite relation” from Foucault, who uses it to describe the relation of the said to the seen, or rather, “the relation of language to painting.” Michel Foucault, “Las Meninas,” in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1970), 10.

of history – in the relation between the prose paragraphs and the opening poem, a relation mediated for the reader through both the translation that Carson provides for the elegy, and the definitions collected in the entries, the latter of which trace manifold points of contact between the verbal surface of the poem, and that of Carson’s text. Indeed, Carson’s prose consistently refers back to Catullus’ lexicon by means of the dictionary entries, sometimes in a rather straightforward fashion – as with Carson’s use of the adjective mute (*mutam*) to describe her brother’s being, or of the verb “to arrive at” (*advenio*) to describe her (ever thwarted) movement towards a satisfactory translation of Catullus 101 – but most often thematically.⁴⁴ For instance, she recurrently alludes to the surface or movement of water (*aequora*) throughout the epitaph, as when she writes of her brother’s death “wandering slowly towards me across the sea” (6.1), of sunflowers circling around on the surface of water (7.2), of history “streaming into me” and, to cite but one more example, of the historian who “wants to lock deeds to showing and prohibit all of it flowing away into nothing” (3.3), a phrase that gestures, in turn, both toward Catullus’ *manantia*, from the verb *manere*, which Carson defines as “to flow, pour, run,” and toward the imperative *accipe*, from the verb *accipere*, which might be translated as “to have flowing in,” according to Carson’s entry. Perhaps most notable among these thematic references, however, is the presence, in almost every entry, of a Latin citation that includes the word for night, such as “made sadder by the brother’s night than by the brother himself” (*nocte fratris quam ipso fratre miserior*) under *miseras*, “in time with the night” (*ad noctem*) under *ad*, and “reaching to the very corners of the night” (*advenientes ad angulos noctis*) under *advenio*, phrases that resonate, respectively, with Carson’s notes on her brother’s opacity, her remarks on the phoenix’

⁴⁴ Corcoran similarly notes that the “moods and emotions of the commentaries bleed into or contaminate the glosses.” Corcoran, “A Brother Never Ends,” 376.

mourning ritual, and her description of the experience of the room.⁴⁵ Carson's translation of the elegy, furthermore, permits the reader to see a certain likeness between Carson's reflections on the events leading up to and surrounding her brother's death, as told over the course of the epitaph, and the content of poem 101, which documents Catullus' mourning ritual for his brother, as per Ancient Roman custom. To sketch but a few of the similarities between the two narratives: Carson, like Catullus, travels across many peoples and many seas (*multa per gentes et multa per aequora vectus*) to go to a foreign city (3.2), which she too reaches (*advenio*) only after her brother has been taken away from her (*adempte*). There, she finds herself unable to perform the customary rites for the dead (5.6), that is, those handed down (*tradita sunt*) by "a distant mood of parents" (7.2), for her brother had already been carried away by (*abstulit*) by the ocean's current, his widow having cast his ashes into the water before Carson even knew of his death (5.6, 7.2). Nevertheless, Carson passes on (*tradita sunt*) the epitaph itself as an offering to the deceased.⁴⁶ With the book, she gives (*donarem*) a final gift to her brother despite her opening claim to owe death nothing, as though she too were asking mute ash (*mutam cinerem*) to take (*accipe*) what will have never been received. Finally, as in Catullus' elegy, the book comes to a close with a hail and farewell (*ave atque vale*), as Carson recites the words spoken by her

⁴⁵ The first entry for *ad* distinguishes itself from the others, for the phrase *ad noctem* recurs throughout the entry, each time accompanied by different translations, as if to suggest that one must iteratively move toward *nox*, or rather, towards the bodies that occupy the darkness of the room, without ever having fully reached it or them. Another translation that falls under *ad* that might be worth noting for its thematic relevance: "to consign oneself to night" (*ad noctem tradere*). Others have noted the persistent appearance of *nox* and its cognates in the entries, including Marsden, "In Search of Lost Sense: The Aesthetics of Opacity in Anne Carson's *Nox*"; Megan O'Rourke, "The Unfolding," *The New Yorker*, 2010, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/07/12/the-unfolding>; Corcoran, "A Brother Never Ends."

⁴⁶ In the elegy, *tradita sunt* refers to Catullus' action in relation to the offerings that he implores his brother to accept. William Fitzgerald notes that the passive construction of the verb ambiguously positions the poet as both a gift-giver and an inheritor of tradition, or, to put it differently, Catullus' phrasing allows for his relation to the gifts or duties in question to be read in both an active and a passive sense. Carson seems to bring out both the passive and active sense of the verb in her own narrative. William Fitzgerald, *Catullan Provocations: Lyric Poetry and the Drama of Position* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 188.

brother's widow at his funeral, and repeats Catullus' *ave*, which appears inscribed in red ink on a fragment of a photograph.

As presented in *Nox*, then, Carson's history appears not only to be written in a language that echoes the words of another, or, more precisely, a language that comes from out of the space of relation between each of Catullus' words, and their manifold meanings, but also to share a common gestural vocabulary with the mourning Roman poet. This vocabulary, I might add, likewise seems to inform how Carson describes or conceives of the actions and movement of others, such as the motion of her brother's death as the sea bears it towards her, the ritual of the mourning phoenix, or the manner in which she herself receives "what comes to me now" as she lets "the sheets of memory blow on the line" (5.5). Indeed, Carson's prose paragraphs so insistently gesture towards and so rigorously rehearse the possibilities of speaking and doing to which Catullus' elegy attests, that the very archive evoked by the latter also appears to delimit what Carson can and can not say and do as she, like Catullus, documents and enacts her own mourning ritual.⁴⁷ The epitaph stages a relation so tangled, or rather, a web of relations so intricate between the elegy, and Carson's words and deeds alike, that Carson's capacity to make history appears to hinge on a potential to perform the actions first scripted by another, that is, to first occupy the place of Catullus' lyric "I." Her capacity to speak, similarly, appears contingent upon a potential to speak by way of another language, or rather, a potential to speak English from the place of the poem's speaking subject – to filter her English through Catullus' Latin, just as the latter, in the act of translating, is forced through the sieve of the former.⁴⁸ Even as *Nox*

⁴⁷ Catullus' elegy, in this respect, seems to function as an exergue, as described by Derrida: "To cite before beginning is to give the tone through the resonance of a few words, the meaning or form of which ought to set the stage. An exergue serves to stock in anticipation and to prearchive a lexicon which, from there on, ought to lay down the law and *give the order*." Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 1996, 7.

⁴⁸ In other words, Carson, in *Nox*, "uses language *as if (she) were always translating*," as she writes of Paul Celan. Celan, she writes, similarly "sees himself ordering language through mesh," which "limits what he can say." Carson, *Economy of the Unlost*, 28, 31.

affirms Carson's capacity to both animate Catullus' words through the work of translation, and, in fact, to record a history, the dense network of similarities staged by the book simultaneously attests to her alienation from both her language, and the history she claims to have lived.⁴⁹ In this respect, Carson's practice evinces a capacity, as Agamben writes of the witness, "to place oneself in one's own language in the position of those who have lost it, to establish oneself in a living language as if it were dead, or in a dead language as it were living – in any case, outside both the archive and the *corpus* of what has already been said."⁵⁰ Carson's use of language, in other words, testifies to a place not unlike that of the mute body, for it marks an absolute loss of language, and remains, therefore, in excess of both the facts or events recollected in the epitaph, and the possibilities of speaking to which the latter attest. Indeed, Carson's writing, when read alongside her translations, casts her as a subject consigned to write from out of a space where speech happens to coincide with silence, a space that unfolds, over the course of *Nox*, in and as the space of relation between Catullus' elegy and Carson's writing, between each Latin word, and every one of its translations, and, more generally, between the dead and the living language. Far from securing a correspondence between Carson's history and her person, then, *Nox* opens onto, and makes palpable the gap between historical fact, and the subject of that history, who exists as a historical subject only insofar as she bears a muteness that, as such, remains outside the possibilities that define the archive. To prowl for history in the space or scene of relation between the living and the dead, *Nox* suggests, is to come in contact with this opacity.

⁴⁹ What Foucault writes on the two pipes, and the written text in Magritte's *Les deux mystères* seems equally to pertain to each element in Carson's text that gestures towards Catullus', and vice-versa. He writes, "whether conflicting or just juxtaposed, these elements annul the intrinsic resemblance they seem to bear within themselves, and gradually sketch an open network of similitudes." Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), 46–49.

⁵⁰ Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, 161.

Catullus' poem 101 similarly attests to a place where the speaking subject falls into silence, and the living being appears inseparable from the dead. The elegy might be characterized as an epitaph in poem form, since, regardless of whether it was originally composed to be carved into stone, it positions the reader at the site of a tomb, to which Catullus has travelled to address, in vain (*nequiquam alloquerer*), his brother's mute remains, and present him with "the last gift owed to death," as Carson would have it.⁵¹ The poem unfolds as an enactment of Catullus' mourning ritual, such that, by the poem's end, he can salute his brother as he finally passes "into forever" (*in perpetuum*), Catullus having released him from the time of the living with his offerings. As Andrew Feldherr notes, the poem thus marks a "progression from one kind of separation to another [...]. As the first couplet focuses on separation in space, with the poet moving towards the tomb of his brother, the final two lines by contrast emphasize separation in time, with the dead brother moving away from the speaker towards eternity."⁵² Studying the poem alongside Roman funerary practices, Feldherr shows that this movement mirrors the motion of making final offerings, which momentarily brings the living together with the dead, only to secure an irreparable distance between them. He goes on to argue, however, that both the content and materiality of Catullus' elegy in fact troubles the distinction between the living and the outlived, thus belying the apparent finality of the brothers' parting. Notable, in this regard, is Feldherr's discussion of the verb *alloquerer*, which Catullus uses to describe his manner of speaking with his brother's "mute ash" (*mutam...cinerem*). Feldherr shows that the verb both affirms the speaking subject's distance from the place of the silent dead, and connotes a certain intimacy between the brothers, suggesting that Catullus' speech "serves only to bind him more

⁵¹ Andrew Feldherr, "Non Inter Nota Sepulcra: Catullus 101 and Roman Funerary Ritual," *Classical Antiquity* 19, no. 2 (2000): 210–11.

⁵² Feldherr, 215–16.

closely to the dead,” as Feldherr puts it.⁵³ *Alloquerer*, in other words, suggests a speaking subject torn in two; Catullus speaks, but to orient himself towards the dead, as much as the living. Catullus’ speech act, as instantiated by the poem in its entirety, thus restores the bounds between the living and the outlived, only to undo them in the very same breath.

The poem itself similarly comes to be riven by opposing movements, for, as a written text, it simultaneously documents Catullus’ performance as he fulfills his responsibility to his brother, and stages his displacement as a speaking subject as another, that is, the reader, comes to speak from his place. William Fitzgerald nicely captures the correspondence between the materiality of the poem and the performance that the latter both stages and enacts when he writes that the poem’s concluding *ave atque vale* “aligns the moment of Catullus’ address to his brother with the simultaneous appearance and disappearance of the completed poem, which flashes into presence only to merge with silence,” a movement that Carson’s presentation of the poem’s translation, as discussed earlier, similarly seems to replicate.⁵⁴ Just as Catullus invokes his brother only to reaffirm his muteness, so the poem scripts the poet’s appearance only to absent him from view, or rather, only to consign him to the opacity occupied by outlived bodies, an outcome further underscored by the phrasing of the elegy’s final couplet, which makes it impossible to determine which *frater* (brother) has been torn away from the other, and, likewise, which one has vanished into forever. The poem, in turn, thus stages a reading that traces the concurrent appearance and disappearance, or, perhaps, appearance-as-disappearance of whoever comes to speak from the place of a brother who mourns, and simultaneously brings the very same speaking subject in contact with not only the mute ash of Catullus’ brother, but also the

⁵³ Feldherr, 216–17.

⁵⁴ Fitzgerald, *Catullan Provocations: Lyric Poetry and the Drama of Position*, 187–88.

mute body of the poet himself, a body carried by the poem.⁵⁵ In this light, the elegy marks the place where multiple, indeed potentially infinite bodies pass from the time of the living into the endless time of the dead, a time not unlike that of the room, defined as it is by the ceaseless groping of the translator's outlived body. As long as Catullus' elegy continues to circulate, neither the ritual that the elegy enacts, nor any reading staged by the latter will have ever culminated in a clean break between the time of the living and the outlived.

Catullus' elegy simultaneously affirms and negates the possibility of communication between the living and the outlived, for it shows that both the poet and his brother, and the reader and the poet, come to share an incapacity of speaking. As *Nox* unfolds, the book similarly opens onto a space of relation in which the speaking subject, or rather, whoever comes to occupy that position, passes into obscurity as they come into contact with, and thus come to be affected by a mute body, a body that exists, in each instance, as a surface to be read. For Carson makes use of language and images throughout the book to delineate the muteness she bears, or rather, to write the space where outlived bodies suffer a common muteness. Carson may have composed the epitaph for brother, but *Nox*, in this sense, is equally her own tomb, which is not simply to say that the book marks her death as the author, but rather to affirm that it carries a body that can not speak for itself, a body that exists in the shadow of Carson's activity, traced by her manifold recitations and translations of the said.⁵⁶ Epitaphs, Carson writes elsewhere, typically "create a

⁵⁵ Feldherr makes a similar claim when he writes that the reader of the poem "takes on not only the role of the grieving Catullus, but through this first level of impersonation, experiences the same mixture of detachment from and possession by the dead as the participant in the rites the poem describes." I take the term "appearance-as-disappearance" from Barthes, who uses it to describe the eroticism of "intermittence," such as the "intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing [...] it is this flash itself which seduces." Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*; Feldherr, "Non Inter Nota Sepulcra: Catullus 101 and Roman Funerary Ritual," 220.

⁵⁶ As Foucault writes, "It is not enough, however, to repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared [...] Instead, we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings this disappearance uncovers." I am suggesting that Carson's muteness occupies this space, these breaches, and these openings. Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," in *Aesthetics*,

space of exchange between present and past,” but *Nox*, in this respect, shows that epitaphs can purchase a present for the past only to the extent that they also open onto that which breaks with an economy predicated on reciprocity, which is to say, an impossibility of speaking or seeing that imposes limits on what words or images can do.⁵⁷ *Nox* not only documents the manner in which the unsayable and unknowable affect Carson as she inquires into the opacity of her brother and confronts the muteness borne by Catullus’ poem, but also stages a reading that rubs up against the unseen and unworded. For the reader, speaking from the place of the outlived author, can prowl the space of relation staged by the book as it unfolds, that is, the space between words and their meanings, between history and its subjects, between a dead and a living language, between each entry and its juxtaposed fragments, as well as between the unseen epitaph and its replica. And, as in the darkness of the room that is translating, the reader too might come to sense the passing bodies that exist in relation to the surface of the pages of the book. Like a brother who forever remains to be seen, these outlived bodies can be read or sensed as such, for they appear in the text as disappeared, mute in all their obscurity.

Method, and Epistemology, ed. James D. Faubion, Essential Works of Foucault (New York, NY: New Press, 1999), 209.

⁵⁷ Carson, *Economy of the Unlost*, 85.

Chapter 3

On the Surface of Water:

Tracing the Unthought with Roni Horn's *Another Water (The River Thames, for Example)*

-

In one of Roni Horn's photographs of water, sunlight glints on shivering waves. In another, a mass of spume sticks to mangled debris. A fog of sediment, olive-coloured, churns beneath the surface in another. Fifty-two of Horn's photographs of the surface of the River Thames appear in her book *Another Water (The River Thames, for Example)*.¹ As in Peter Hujar's photographs of the Hudson River, and Vija Celmins' drawings of seas, water fills the frame of Horn's photographs.² Horn takes the fugitive qualities of water as her subject, revealing subtleties in tone, texture, luminosity, and motion across the pages of the book. The river's waters look matte, lurid, slick, rough, and wrinkled in turn; they reflect a range of shifting colors, and varying degrees of turbulence, filth, viscosity, and shadow. Across the surface of each image, details like small vortices, spots of crystalline clarity, and specks of leaves and litter appear in equal focus, further distinguishing each photograph from every other.³ As the waters accumulate, however,

¹ Roni Horn, *Another Water (The River Thames, for Example)* (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl Publishers, 2000); Roni Horn, *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)*, 1999, Fifteen offset lithographs on uncoated paper (photographs and text), 76.2 x 104.1 cm each; Roni Horn, *Some Thames*, 2000, 80 inkjet prints on lacquered paper, 70 x 103 cm each (frame included); Roni Horn, *Dictionary of Water* (Paris, France: Edition 7L, 2001). The latter two works do not include a textual element. Each of these works stages a distinct experience, not only by virtue of the absence or presence of text, but also because the photographs, in each instance, appear in relation to a different space. *Some Thames*, for instance, runs through the hallways of the University of Akureyri in Iceland, while the *Dictionary of Water* carries a series of glossy, uncaptioned images in a single book.

² See, for example, Peter Hujar, *Hudson River*, 1975, gelatin silver print; Vija Celmins, *Ocean Surface*, 2006, screenprint on paper, 53 x 67.9 cm; Roni Horn, *To Place: Arctic Circles* (Denver, CO: Ginny Williams, 1998). In this respect, Horn's photographs of the Thames differ from images that present the relation between water and sky, or water and air, such as Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Seascapes* (1980-present), which consists of 220 black and white photographs of the surface of the ocean in relation to the horizon, or Gerhard Richter's series *Seestück (Seascape)* (1968-98), which consists of 25 paintings based on photographs that depict the sea in relation to the skies above. Horn includes images that resemble Sugimoto's in Book VI of her *To Place* series, *To Place: Arctic Circles* (Denver, CO: Ginny Williams, 1998).

³ In the entry for *Another Water* in Horn's "subject index," the second volume in a 2-part publication produced on the occasion of Horn's 2009 exhibition *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn* at the Tate Modern in London, Iwona Blazwick

particular patterns and shades resurface, suggesting a certain sameness across time and space. Sometimes, the difference between particular images is so slight at first glance, that distinct moments of water appear to echo each other, provoking a sense of recognition or return in the midst of a flowing stream. More often than not, the effect is disorienting rather than steadying; in the absence of horizons or shorelines, images of water makes it easy to lose track of where one stands.

Horn's photographs each span a double-page spread, and continue to flow around the front and back fold-out covers of the book, evoking a movement that neither begins nor ends. A sequence of 832 footnotes runs beneath the images. Typed in small print on a narrow white band, and unmoored from the body of any main text, these notes trace a series of associations with, reflections on, and questions concerning water, the Thames, the photographs, and the notes themselves.⁴ In some, the writer describes her sense of standing by the river and watching water disappear as it rushes downstream. In others, she compares the images above to other landscapes, elements, patterns and objects, like deserts, cadmium, camouflage, and paintings. A handful of notes ponder the reasons why so many choose to drown themselves in the Thames, while quotations drawn from sources as varied as Emily Dickinson, Joseph Conrad, Al Green, and Ira Gershwin surface in a number of others. Sometimes, one note will spill over into an immediately subsequent note by means of a note-within-a-note, suggesting a certain depth to the body of text that fills the white band, or a ripple on the surface of the language – a tiny disturbance within an otherwise uniform flow. Often, as though animated by unseen currents, the notes appear to spiral into repetitive sequences, circling back on themselves as fragments of text resurface with only

notes how the photographs were capture: "The use of a specially designed setup made it possible to suspend cameras on either side of a tugboat, ensuring that Horn could gain a flat overview of the water and an equal focus across the surface of the image." Horn, *Roni Horn Aka Roni Horn*, 2:12.

⁴ "What about this note? Do you like it? I could have moved it to another page but that might have changed its content" (to cite but one note on the notes). Horn, *Another Water (The River Thames, for Example)*, note 287.

minor variations. Extended sequences similarly recur, at once creating a sense of return not unlike the accompanying series of photographs, and troubling the numerical order in which the notes appear. “Here you are at note 286, and even though there’s a beginning to this book maybe you started somewhere else,” note 286 reads, intimating that any number is as good as any other when it comes time to dip your hand in such a stream of thoughts.⁵ Another note asserts, “these notes, rootless, flowing one into another, are tiny landmarks of relation” (AW, 466), suggesting that the notes map ways of being with, or being oriented towards water, images of water, and writings on water. Here, number serves only to index singular moments or scenes of relation.

The content of the notes similarly seems to follow a logic that manifests a certain turbulence. The text calls for a reading that can navigate the space between impossible facts, for paradoxes emerge, claims enter into contradiction, and rhetorical questions come to negate each other as the notes cycle through their variant repetitions. The writer asks, for instance, “Isn’t water a plural form? How could it ever be singular, even in one river?” (AW, 170), only to reverse the question in a later note, where she writes, “How could it ever be plural, even when from all the rivers combined? All waters are one water” (AW, 402). Read alongside each other, these notes appear to affirm that water is neither a singular nor a plural form, or rather, a form both singular and plural; each rhetorical question gestures towards the other in an infinite regress, leaving the grammatical number of water unresolved. If, as the writer notes elsewhere, “water is one thing only – it has no other” (AW, 326), then the substance is also “a kind of

⁵ The final 286 notations reiterate the first 285 with only minor, but not insignificant variations – not insignificant because the fact of minor variation is significant within the context of the work. I will return to this. Horn, *Another Water (The River Thames, for Example)*.

everything without definition” (AW, 58), a thing, that is, wholly defined by infinite possibilities. Thinking about water, these notes suggest, necessarily entails thinking through logical paradox.⁶

Indeed, *Another Water* makes the claim that paradox defines the very existence of water. As presented in the book, water is entirely inseparable from what Horn describes as “the opposite of water” (AW, 50): black water. Black water is the name for “an unnamed liquid, another water – one as yet without identity that shares only its appearance and only a part of that with water. This surprises because where you expect to see water, for example, in a river, you see instead some colored fluid mimicking water; it is a surrogate water, a petrified water” (AW 91). Black water, in other words, shares the same form as any given body of water, but, on the surface, looks like something other than water – like something that water is not. As another note affirms, “anyone can see that it isn’t water that flows in the River Thames” (AW, 324). “Whatever it is that’s flowing in the river,” the following note continues, “it’s not by the book (at least not by the dictionary). None of the adjectives used to define water can be applied to the Thames. (It’s not clear or pure; it’s not colorless; it’s not odorless or tasteless.)” (AW, 325). Black water names this liquid that is not water, this liquid that appears as the negation of the qualities that define

⁶ Horn often speaks of her attraction to paradox. For instance, on *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)*, she writes, “I am deeply drawn to (the) possibility of existing in two spaces at the same time, without any contradiction, a lot of paradox but no contradiction, a lot of things being the opposite of what they are but somehow they can carry on with being both sides of the story.” Here, Horn seems to see paradox less in logical than in spatial terms, or rather, as a certain experience of space(s). In this sense, Horn’s fondness for paradox can be associated with her use of doubling in works such as *For Two Rooms* (1986), in which two identical objects are placed in two rooms, and *Becoming a Landscape* (1999-2001), an installation that consists of paired images captured only seconds apart. In these works, doubling, far from affirming an equivalence, instead provokes and sustains a certain disequilibrium: as the viewer moves back and forth between rooms, or ricochets back and forth between separately framed duplicates, a diffuse difference becomes palpable, that is, a difference that cannot be located with any amount of certainty, even when particular differences can in fact be seen. It is a kind of difference that remains nearly imperceptible, or rather, identifiable only as something about the experience of each one, as in, “something about the lips here...,” or “something about the light right there...” Difference appears only to remain on the tip of the tongue. Like paradox, doubling here creates a kind of infinite regress. Roni Horn, “The Master Chameleon: Water,” *Tate Etc.*, Summer 2007; Horn, *Roni Horn Aka Roni Horn*, 2:18–20, 22–24, 137; Roni Horn, *For Two Rooms*, 1986, Two solid copper forms, diameter 29.2-43.2 cm each, length 88.9 cm each; Roni Horn, *Becoming a Landscape*, 1999-2001, Twenty chromogenic prints, six prints 52.1 x 52.1 cm each, fourteen prints 77.5 x 58.4 cm each.

water as such.⁷ “It’s a mistake to believe that black is merely an adjective,” another note advises, for “black and water are twin elements” (AW, 49). The blackness of black water, then, is less a color, than a condition con-substantial with water, which is to say that regardless of whether water appears light or dark, limpid blue or murky beige, there is no water that is not also black. “Under the cover of harsh, elusive colors, black is constant” (AW, 412), the writer notes elsewhere, suggesting, even further, that the blackness of water remains imperceptible, and therefore even more intractable than the sensible qualities of the substance, which, however evanescent, at least present themselves to be seen, said, and known.⁸ In this respect, the black in black water corresponds to the part of water that will have always remained unthought.⁹ “Isn’t that part of what water is, that you never really know what it is?” (AW, 58); the part of water that is black lies out of reach of the senses, forever obscured by the look, smell, feel, or taste of one surrogate water or another.

⁷ Horn’s pair of cylindrical sculptures entitled *The Opposite of White, V.1* and *V.2*, the former cast in colourless glass, and the latter in black glass, evokes the relation between water and its opposite. The second version of the sculpture arguably materializes water’s double, without reconciling the two. Roni Horn, *Opposite of White, v.1*, 2006, solid cast glass, height 38.1 cm, diameter 101.6 cm; Roni Horn, *Opposite of White, v.2*, 2007, solid cast glass, height 38.1 cm, diameter 101.6 cm.

⁸ Looking into the Thames, the writer remarks, “gives the feeling that the water is occupied almost to the exact volume of the river with something other than water – perhaps another water.” In this respect, one might say that black exists as the body of water – not a body of water, which would identify the former as something comparable to a river or a lake, rather than co-constitutive of water, but rather body as the space where water comes to appear as such, or, following Jean-Luc Nancy’s sense of the term, body as the place of water’s exposition and extension. As Nancy writes, “the body is neither a ‘signifier’ nor a ‘signified.’ It’s exposing/exposed: [...] an extension of the *there*, the site of a breakthrough through which *it can come in from the world*.” World, here, does not refer to the empirical world (e.g., water that glistens, glimmers, or gurgles), but corresponds to the place of sense, which, for Nancy, is the space, or rather, the spacing that is body. Nancy, *Corpus*, 25, 27, 33–37; Horn, *Another Water (The River Thames, for Example)*, note 3.

⁹ There is a growing body of literature that positions blackness, in the racial sense, in or as a space akin to the place described by Horn as black. For Horn, however, black seems to lie on a register that would resist any claim to ownership; as I will show, black becomes palpable in and as a certain mode of relating to the world, one that rests on undoing, rather than holding firm to social or political categories, and all of the history they bear. In this regard, Horn’s concerns in *Another Water* diverge from those raised in the writing, for instance, of Sharpe, Hartman, Moten, Wilderson, and Harney. See Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Saidiya V. Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson, III, “The Position of the Unthought,” *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2 (2003): 183–201; Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, “Fantasy in the Hold,” in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York, NY: Autonomedia, 2013).

Over the course of *Another Water*, Horn suggests that black water appears by virtue of the relation between water and light, that is, the relation that grounds the perception and conception of water as such, be it in darkness or daylight. The myriad patterns and textures of reflective light that appear in the images demonstrate that this relation is mutually reciprocal: water affects how light appears, just as light affects the appearance of water. “Have you ever noticed how water camouflages light?” (AW, 277), asks one note, to which another note responds, “Have you ever noticed how light camouflages water?” (AW, 363). As a transparent medium, water at once makes light its own, and takes on the look of light, just as light, irradiating water, at once disappears into the substance, and entirely suffuses it with itself. As one note asserts, “Water is about light, about manifesting light. Darkness is about light too. Blackness,” however, “is about no light, about questioning the existence of light.” To sense the blackness of water is to perceive something in water that lies outside of the relation between water and light, that is, before or beyond the relation that makes water seeable and knowable as such. “Black discounts light,” another note affirms, “it’s only visible because it does, unlike everything around it” (AW, 348). Impervious to light, blackness comes to view in and as an impossibility of seeing, or rather, as a transparency, that is, as whatever appears imperceptible when light and water come into contact with each other.¹⁰ In this regard, the light that plays on the waves in a river, or that reveals a penny at the bottom of a pool, at once exposes a blackness that remains unseen, an opacity as impenetrable as water is porous. Gazing upon the colors that light up the water of the Thames, for instance, the writer can sense the non-visible opacity

¹⁰ Writing on Horn’s *Water, Selected* (2007), an installation of twenty-four glass columns, each filled with water drawn from a glacier in Iceland, Briony Fer similarly notes the opacity of transparency: “It turns out that there is nothing less pure or less clear than transparency. That it is in the end as opaque as language. In the Library of Water, the clear columns allow you to see through them but also distort what you see. They may be perfectly clear, but they are contingent, as ever, on the time of day and the weather. Despite the fact that transparency is supposedly defined by an absence of its own materiality, here it is very palpable.” *Another Water*, similarly, brings to the fore the distortions effected by seemingly transparent materials. Fer, “Storm of the Eye,” 26.

within. In one note, she describes the river's surface as "wrapping that covers what's inside. But," the note goes on, "it doesn't make a difference because past the wrapping you know it's black in there" (AW, 346). Whether crystalline, coloured, or drab, the surface appearance of water attests to the blackness of the place where water, pervaded by light, remains unseen.¹¹

A number of other notes affirm that sight and thought relate to water in a manner analogous to light. These notes similarly insist that water, far from appearing for itself, can only ever recede from view as soon as it comes into contact with something other than itself. Suggesting that water not only manifests light, but also, much like writing, brings to view a mode of seeing or knowing, one note reads, "These notes, rootless, flowing one into another like overrun tracks in the snow – tracks that precede you – are the projections of seeing and knowing" (AW 468). "That's the thing about water: it absorbs your projections" (AW, 489), another note adds. Water, in other words, wholly receives your gaze, taking in all of the history and culture borne by sight no less than it soaks up reflections and light. Consequently, water appears as such only to reflect your relation to it, or rather, only to embody the manner in which your projections come to affect it.¹² As another note puts it, "Your water, my water, is coupled water. Water is never only a form, it's a relation, too" (AW, 361). What you or I take as water is only water as it exists in light of any given encounter; water only ever presents itself in and as a relation to something else, say, the clear glass that contains it, the hint of lime that flavors it, the

¹¹ The blackness of water, in this regard, is palpable only by virtue of a certain collaboration between water and its opposite. In other words, as Kaufman writes on "mind-body fusion" and "mind-body separation," water and black water are "two formations at once contradictory and complementary, and in this sense they reflect a dialectical form of logic, one that does not collapse oppositions but allows them to constructively coexist side by side." Following Deleuze, Kaufman describes this non-dialectical dialectic as a "disjunctive dialectic"; in *Another Water*, black itself arguably lies in this out-of-joint space. Eleanor Kaufman, *Deleuze, The Dark Precursor* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 54.

¹² In several notes, the writer identifies songs in the sounds of the river, affirming that the projections absorbed by the river are far from limited to the visual. "I don't know if you've had this experience," she writes, "but occasionally when I'm watching the water I hear snippets from various songs drifting up from the river. (Sometimes I even recognize the voice.)" It would be interesting to study the manner in which *Another Water* figures sound; for the purposes of this chapter, however, I will primarily stick to the manner in which it addresses the visible and the non-visible. Horn, *Another Water (The River Thames, for Example)*, notes 281-3.

shape of a riverbed, or the concept of blue.¹³ Precisely by virtue of its porosity, however, water “loses itself, becoming (only) an image of itself” (AW, 420). “Water is too tolerant,” the following note affirms, “It loses itself, becoming the opposite of water: a water that will pollute you” (AW 421). Flooded not only with light, but also with the viewer’s projections, water, having lost itself, turns black. As opposed to water, black water is “uncoupled water” (AW, 50), which is to say, water unhinged from the landscape of the seen and the known. This water will have never been yours or mine for the taking, for, as another note affirms, its opacity is absolute, impermeable to sight and thought alike: “Blackness is complete, no room for anything else; complete with an untouchable purity. Blackness excludes everything – including you. You can’t participate in it, you can’t add anything to it – or affect it” (AW, 109). To perceive water as black, then, is to see that water harbors “a darkness that has no image” (AW, 292), an opacity that exceeds the viewer’s projections. Black water, in other words, attests to an existence that remains outside the relation between the viewer and the view, an existence that occupies the very place where water couples you or I to what we respectively come to take as water.¹⁴ Without relation to light or reason, and beyond perception and recognition alike, black water strips both the viewer and the view of their transparency.¹⁵ If “the opacity of the world dissipates in water” (AW, 159), then “black water can not dissipate the opacity of the world” (AW, 160).

¹³ As Horn writes of Iceland, water, in this sense, is “an act, not an object, a verb, never a noun.” Discussing *To Place*, which centers on her relationship to Iceland, she writes, “Iceland taught me that each place is a unique location of change [...] The view is not separate from the viewer; Iceland viewed is something other than Iceland. Similarly, the identity of the viewer is not separate from the place viewed.” This reciprocity equally informs the viewer’s relation to water, as described in *Another Water*. Horn, *Roni Horn Aka Roni Horn*, 2:148.

¹⁴ Black water, in this regard, poses a challenge to what Quentin Meillassoux calls “correlationism,” which, as described by Ray Brassier, “insists that there can be no cognizable reality independent of our relation to reality; no phenomena without some transcendental operator – such as life or consciousness or *Dasein* – generating the conditions of manifestation through which phenomena manifest themselves.” Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 51.

¹⁵ The imagery that Jean-Luc Nancy uses to theorize the ground and the image evokes Horn’s description of black water. Of the ground, he writes “it is at once the profound depth of a possible shipwreck and the surface of the luminous sky. The image floats, in sum, at the whim of the swells, mirroring the sun, poised over the abyss, soaked by the sea, but also shimmering with the very thing that threatens it and bears it up at the same time.” Jean-Luc

The notes in *Another Water*, then, affirm the co-existence of water and its imperceptible double, a pair of opposites that share the same space, but attest to different modes of being, and distinct registers of experience. Several notes, further, invite a comparison between each of these contradictory forms of water, and thought. “Crumbs of whitish froth float on the water. They cluster in formations that are not affected by the river’s movement, in formations that linger too long” (AW, 278), one note reads. Aligning the movement of water with the movement of thought, another claims, “These notes, rootless, flowing one into another, are the crumbs of cognition: connections that frame the view, connections that name the view” (AW 469). Just as crumbs of froth drift to the surface of moving water, that is, water moved or polluted by something other than itself, so crumbs of thought float to the surface of consciousness at the sight of water. Like bits of mental froth, these crumbs simultaneously settle on the water’s surface in forms that appear unmoved by the passing of time and the rush of the river alike, in forms that linger even after the river’s waters have carried the view away.¹⁶ As one note claims of these crumbs, “the water’s reflections are speckled with them (Mine are, too.)” (AW, 495).¹⁷ Here, water and thought both move in response to being in relation; this movement, however, remains unseen, streaming on beneath the crumbs of froth and crumbs of thought that litter the surfaces of water and mind. Another note claims that the sight of black water, in contrast, brings the viewer in contact with the movement of the river. The note reads, “Your reflection uncouples

Nancy, “The Image - the Distinct,” in *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005), 13.

¹⁶ In this respect, these so-called “crumbs of cognition” bring to mind Derrida’s remark that “the text we call present may be deciphered only at the bottom of the page, in a footnote or postscript. Before the recurrence, the present is only the call for a footnote.” One might say that the river, like the conscious text, will have never been present to living experience, but only reconstituted by a footnote, after the fact. Jacques Derrida, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 212.

¹⁷ In *Still Water (The River Thames for Example)* (1999), the numbers corresponding to the notes are in fact scattered across the surface of each image. Writing on the work, Fer similarly compares these numbers to “tiny bits of foam floating on the surface.” In the spattering of numbers, she adds, “the implication of pollution and toxicity is never far away.” Briony Fer, “Complete with Missing Parts,” in *Roni Horn Aka Roni Horn*, by Roni Horn, vol. 1 (Gottingen, Germany: Steidl Publishers, 2009), 33–34.

in this water. It drifts away from you. As you stand there on the bank or bridge, helpless, watching your reflection float downstream and disappear, you may wonder what forces black water gathers” (AW, 239). Black water, in other words, distances you from yourself no sooner than your reflection has come to view; as opposed to constituting the viewer and the view in relation to each other, this water both undoes the viewer and disappears the view in relation to imperceptible forces. “This water confuses me,” the writer affirms, “When I’m by the river I find myself wondering: Who am I? Where am I? What is this?” (AW, 161). Given that the river’s movement mirrors the flow of thought, these notes suggest that thought itself bears an opacity that uncouples the viewer from the frames and names that register the manner in which they come to relate to the world. The notes imply, to put it differently, that thought bears an unbecoming force, a force that can dissolve the terms by which you know yourself and others, thereby bringing you to witness your own disappearance.

The manner in which water appears in relation to light, then, not only mirrors the manner in which water comes to be seen and known, but also reflects the workings of thought itself. *Another Water* suggests, in other words, that water and black water correspond to two distinct modes of thought. When thought operates like water, it both posits itself as the source of relationality, and sustains the mutual reciprocity between related terms. Given this reciprocity, the manner in which relations come to be remains unthinkable, for nothing can be thought beyond the world as it is given to or lived by the seeing and knowing subject. This mode of thought, further, secures the relation between the thinking being and the unknowable by rehabilitating the latter as a vital or generative force.¹⁸ Accordingly, one note claims, “water

¹⁸ My thinking here is indebted to Claire Colebrook’s argument against “a return of theory to the body, to affects, to living systems, living labor or praxis,” in favor of theory that would consider “a world that is not ourselves and a force that cannot be returned to the human.” I would argue that the black water figures that non-human, unliveable force. Colebrook, “Extinct Theory,” 35–38.

receives you, affirms you, shows you who you are” (AW, 40), suggesting that the element, as might be said of thought, conceals itself only to support your own self-realization. “Water is the master verb: an act of perpetual relation” (AW, 362), another note declares, as though water were becoming itself, nothing but a movement of continuous coupling, forever relating what you see and who you are, or your past and your future. Whether thought presents itself as crumbs of cognition, or as projections of seeing and knowing, it similarly “shows you who you are,” or rather, brings to light your relation to yourself and others, for it makes everything it touches appear in its own image. Black water, on the other hand, corresponds to a mode of thought that turns away or withdraws from the world as it is experienced or brought into being so as to confront the unliveable opacity that grounds the scene of relationality. If water figures thought as a movement of recuperation, then black water embodies a movement of thought towards the very place where relations emerge. This mode of thought, in other words, turns towards the very place where thought, streaming forward, perpetually relates, a place that remains opaque to thought itself. “Black is a place,” one note affirms, “I don’t know what it’s like, can’t see it, but I know it’s there. You can go there – though it’s not fixed in location [...] You never know much about it, it doesn’t give much away (that’s the idea of black); you just have to go there. Black is where you can suspend your faith” (AW, 544). Whether located in water or thought, black exists precisely in and as the place where relations come to be suspended, which is to say, the place where terms lose themselves upon coming into contact with others. To go to this place would be to think, or feel your way towards the loss that comes with being in relation, a loss to which each moment of thought attests no less than the sensuous surface of water, with its mutable textures and tones. To think towards black would be to sense the place where thought, differing from

itself as it stages the scene of relationality yet again, ceaselessly opens up the possibility of thinking otherwise.¹⁹

Several notes suggest that going to black is less an act of will, than an act of abandon, or, more precisely, abandonment to the sensuousness of water. The writer does not so much choose to go to black, as she is lured towards it in the act of watching the movement of the water in the Thames; she goes to the place that is black by attending to the manner in which water, ever-elusive, offers itself to be sensed. “Water is sexy. (The sensuality of it tantalizes me when I’m near it.)” (AW, 141), she writes. “And all the near-imperceptible qualities that are water tease you with their ambiguity. Tease you and extend you, out into the world” (AW, 40). Teasing and tantalizing, the sensuality of water draws the writer out towards the river, only to rouse her desire for her own disappearance. Watching eddies coil on the surface of the water, she writes,

I want to feel time twist as I watch these spirals forming. I want to feel time twist and myself turning as I watch them disappear. I want to twist with the turning water. I want to watch these spirals turn themselves invisible. [...] I want to turn invisible with them. I want to turn with them: invisible – and keep turning. (AW, 228)

The look of the water lures the writer towards the unseen place where it spirals into and out of view, in keeping with its own twisting time. Attending to the movement of the water makes the writer want to move with the substance as it passes beyond the visible, despite her knowledge that the river runs too fast for her to ever match its pace. As she says, “I want to be in the time the river runs to. I want to synchronize myself with the flow of the water. I want to see everything. (I know the river’s too fast for me.) But I still want to see it. I want to see beyond the

¹⁹ Colebrook similarly advocates for a mode of thinking that would take place as “an enquiry into the emergence of terms and relations.” For Colebrook, following Deleuze, inquiring in such a mode would move thought beyond the world as it is lived, and towards “powers to make differences,” which “exist eternally in a plane beyond constituted subjects,” that is, in a plane outside the possibility of relation. On Colebrook’s reading of Deleuze, these differential forces at once let the world be sensed in all of its singular manifestations, and open up every encounter to infinite potentialities to have been otherwise. Within the context of *Another Water*, the place that is black seems comparable to the Deleuzian plane where differences come to be actualized as such. Colebrook, “How Queer Can You Go?,” 193–94, 196–97.

slur of it. I want to keep looking until I do” (AW, 233). To see beyond the slur of moving water, that is, beyond water that keeps running into other waters, its moments too fluid to distinguish, and its vicissitudes too subtle to discern – to see beyond this slur would be to see something that lies beyond the scope of the phenomenological subject; it would be to sense the place of the river’s existence, that is, the very place where the river’s body runs. Moved to follow spot after spot on the water as each one streams away, the writer comes to be displaced, at once “pulled from where I stand” (AW, 490) and “pulled in this moment, stretched in time, elongating downriver, my gaze attenuating as this one spot passes from my view” (AW, 491).²⁰ Having surrendered herself to the river’s flow, she is rushed beside herself rather than reflected, endlessly drawn toward the place where the river slips out of her grasp. Here, the relation between the viewer and the view is both founded on and sustained by a scene of ceaseless estrangement and rapt absorption. “How does water remain so unfamiliar?” (AW, 235), one note asks. The notes suggest a response: unpredictable and ever-variable, the movement of water incessantly brings sight in touch with black, the place where relations open up to possibilities unforeseen.

Rather than describing the writer’s movement towards black, other notes guide the reader to that place. Often referring to “this water,” “this picture,” “this moment,” or simply, “this,” these notes stage an inquiry into the surface appearance of water, as captured by the photographs in the book. Photographs of water essentially picture another water, for to photograph water, as one note remarks, is to “strip it of its form: of its restless, liquid reality” (AW, 125). “When you photograph water,” the following note continues, “you give it an image that in essential ways

²⁰ Following Colebrook’s reading of D.H. Lawrence’s poem ‘Snake,’ this scene might also be described as an “encounter between two disjunct temporalities,” where “the inhuman, or the powers of time and movement that do not serve recognition and command, are expressed [...] as a certain capacity to live the earth not as one’s own.” Claire Colebrook, “Queer Aesthetics,” in *Sex after Life: Essays on Extinction*, Vol. 2 (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2014), 95–98.

bears no likeness to water” (AW, 126). Photography, in this sense, materializes the manner in which the viewer’s projections come to freeze, however fleetingly, a thing that knows no capture, or, to put it differently, the manner in which light, sight, and thought turn water black.²¹ As another note affirms, seeing a photograph of water is comparable to seeing an image float to the surface of black water, or rather, to recognizing water in the very same place as a slur:

This photograph is an image of a moment on the Thames. It is also a moment similar to other moments of moving water and especially moments of rapidly moving water that were hardly visible. But you extrapolate from your experience, you recognize things you’ve never actually seen – things that simply weren’t visible. [...] You feel like you’ve seen it before. But you haven’t, what you’ve actually seen is a slur: the form a river often takes in real time. (AW, 124)

Whether water appears on paper or in its liquid form, recognition of the substance remains founded on something unseen, something that endlessly keeps water from settling. Photographs of water may not offer the reader a sense of water’s “restless, liquid reality,” but they nevertheless open onto an equally intractable movement: the movement by which water comes to be seen and known.²² Precisely by virtue of being portraits of black water, then, the photographs in *Another Water* open the possibility of re-tracing the movement by which water is perceived and recognized as such, and, accordingly, of inquiring into the source of the viewer’s relation to water.²³ Just as watching moving water twist and flow draws the writer towards black, reflecting upon the manner in which still water appears can carry a viewer towards that unseen place.

²¹ A similar operation is also described by Snyder, who, referring to a Walker Evans photograph, describes the image as “the depiction of objects we determine when looking or attending to what is in front of us,” rather than “the representation of a visual experience.” Joel Snyder, “Picturing Vision,” *Critical Inquiry* 6, no. 3 (1980): 509.

²² In her review of Horn’s 2009 survey at the Tate Modern, Jeanette Winterson similarly observes that Horn “uses the visible – the image – to reveal what I suspect she thinks of as the actual – a dimensional, sculptural energy made manifest on a surface plane.” Jeanette Winterson, “Entering the Flow-World,” *Art World Magazine*, March 2009.

²³ Writing on Horn’s *To Place* publication series (1990-2006), Nancy Spector similarly notes that “for Horn, the photograph is not a representation or a documentation of a specific site, even though there is no escaping the peculiar past tense of the image, the sense of having-been-there that is inscribed in every photographic print. Taking into account the artist’s method of producing photographs that only exist in relational situations – whether as pages in a book or part of an installation – it can be said that her photographs are *in themselves* the work, and, like building blocks, they construct an actual experience of time and place. They defy the viewer to be physically present in the perceptual moment.” Spector, “Roni Horn: Picturing Place,” 50.

Some examples are in order. Beneath an image of an undulating, matte, beige-toned expanse, a few notes read, “What does water look like? / See sand. (Especially sand dunes.) / See deserts, for example the Gobi or the Sahara” (AW, 36-8). Similarly prompting the reader to question the look of water, a couple of notes that appear below a heavy haze of greens and yellows, ask, “Doesn’t this picture look familiar? / Are you thinking Claude Monet too?” (AW, 88-9). By setting the scene for an inquiry into the appearance of water, these notes script a reading that simultaneously retraces the movement by which viewer and view come to be constituted in relation to each other, and casts that relation in doubt. Regardless of whether you see a sea of sand or a Monet flicker into view upon re-treading these “overrun tracks in the snow – tracks that precede you” (AW, 468), these images still invite you to relate to water otherwise, troubling, by means of a gentle questioning, the apparent transparency of the element. Further unsettling the relation between the reader and the images in the book, several sequences of notes pose questions that resist any one solution, as though projecting doubt rather than knowledge, or, more accurately, knowledge in the service of doubt, onto the images above. “What is this? / Moonlight or mercury?” (AW, 105-6), one note asks beneath a picture that could pass as either one. Beneath the desert-like surface mentioned above, another series of questions similarly inquire, “Is this khaki or beige? / Is this beige or ochre? / Is this ochre or yellow? / Is this yellow or tan? / Is this tan or brown? Is this brown or black? / Is this black?” (AW, 28-34), assailing the reader with alternatives that equally apply to the view, alternatives that seem close to indistinguishable in the waters captured in the photograph. These and comparable other notes frame the water that appears in each photograph less as a substance, than as a medium for reflection, that is, as a means to problematize how water is perceived and known, or rather, as a means for each reader to problematize their relation to water.²⁴ The notes, in other words, cast

²⁴ On the topic of water-as-medium, I am tempted to say, after Rosalind Krauss, that water is the “technical support”

each of the images in *Another Water* as an entrance to a space of doubt, which is to say, a space in which the relation between the viewer and the view comes to be poised at the point of its emergence, and identities, dissolved in the act of questioning, appear to hover on the brink of becoming. This space marks the source of relationality, that is, the place that is black; when seen in light of the notes, Horn's photographs bring the reader in contact with the place where water remains uncoupled from the connections that name it, and the projections that bring it to light as such.

Horn's book *Index Cixous (Cix Pax)*, which collects eighty photographs of Hélène Cixous, similarly stages a reading that makes black palpable.²⁵ These images portray Cixous' face in close-up, with her lids and brows darkened with liner, her forehead framed with cropped, salt-and-pepper curls, and the curve of her neck below.²⁶ Printed on separate pages and frequently following from each other, Cixous' portraits often come together to compose sequences that map gestures, activities, or scenes as they unfold in time. Saturating certain moments with a lucidity unlike the others, colour photographs sporadically punctate these sequences, which predominantly appear in black-and-white. In one sequence, Cixous' head inclines in one direction, and then another, while her gaze, cast down, intently stays on something that lies outside the frame of the image. In another, her brows raise and her forehead

for *Another Water*, as it seems to be for so many pieces across Horn's oeuvre, including but not limited to *Vatnasafn/Library of Water* (2007-present), which incorporates water in its fluid form. See Rosalind E. Krauss, "Two Moments from the Post-Medium Condition," *October* 116 (2006): 55–62.

²⁵ Roni Horn, *Index Cixous (Cix Pax)* (Gottingen, Germany: Steidl Publishers, 2005).

²⁶ *Index Cixous (Cix Pax)* is one of a number of portrait series by Horn. These works include, but are not limited to, *This is Me, This is You* (1999–2000), a photographic installation composed of paired grids, each of which present forty-eight, closely cropped images of a young girl; *Portrait of an Image (with Isabelle Huppert)* (2005), which consists of one hundred images of Huppert's face, captured while Huppert, according to Horn's instructions, impersonated herself through the lens of roles that she had formerly played; and *You are the Weather* (1994–5), which gathers one hundred images taken in hot springs across Iceland, each of which depict the face of a woman as it registers the weather, against the backdrop of water from which she seems to have emerged. These works not only share a concern with the themes of identity and difference, or rather, the theme of difference as constitutive of identity, but also seem to unfold as enquiries into the scene of relationality; each series appears to stage this scene in a distinct modality.

crinkles as speech flickers across her lips, which part, pout, and tighten in turn. Looking to the right, her eyes soften as her smile opens into a laugh in yet another sequence. In every instance, Cixous' face evinces a receptivity not unlike the porosity on display in Horn's photographs of water; the portraits similarly picture a surface that presents itself in relation to its environs, or rather, registers a mode of responding to the affective force of being in relation. Much like the images in *Another Water*, the portraits in *Index Cixous* offer a means to sense the manner in which a body, affected by whatever comes its way, comes to differentiate from itself, becoming an image of itself yet again.²⁷ In this respect, the moods that wash over Cixous' face from portrait to portrait appear to express her identity no more than the many moods of water reflect the essence of that substance.²⁸ On the contrary, whether she appears calm, impassive, joyous, or gentle, her portraits expose an interiority entirely confluent with whatever occupies the space outside the field of the image, that is, with whatever bodies, words, scents, sounds, thoughts, or looks come to move her with every passing moment.²⁹ Far from indexing Cixous' person, the portrait series, in this sense, traces a loss of identity, or a dissolution of self; the portraits index the passage of unseen or near-imperceptible moments, moments that mark the singular place of Cixous' existence, that is, the place where she comes undone upon coming into contact with

²⁷Or, to put it differently, *Index Cixous* offers a means to sense a singular mode of differentiation, a mode that defines the very existence of its subject. Arguing for a "modal ontology," that is, an ontology founded precisely on the manner in which a being differentiates or departs from itself, Agamben uses language that resonates with my concerns. With reference to the image of being as flux, he writes the following: "If one maintains the image of flux, then the most adequate form for thinking mode is that of conceiving it as a vortex in the flux of being. It has no substance other than that of the one being, but, with respect to the latter, it has a figure, a manner, and a movement that belong to it on its own. The modes are eddies in the boundless field of the substance that, by sinking and whirling into itself, disseminates and expresses itself in singularities." Each photograph in *Index Cixous* and *Another Water* arguably depicts one such singularity. Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 174.

²⁸ As Elisabeth Lebovici puts it, the portraits "melt (Cixous') identities, as we might speak of the melting of snow or a glacier, of a place, that is, that is being changed by time." As the images accumulate, Lebovici likewise affirms, "identity is diffracted in a multiplicity of representations which in turn index motions and construct a seismograph of emotions." Elisabeth Lebovici, "Faces That Speak Volumes," *Tate Etc.*, Spring 2009.

²⁹ I take the term confluence from Horn, who writes elsewhere, "to have confluence between exterior and interior, between visible and non-visible, is a form of transparency." Roni Horn, "Among Essential Furnishings," in *Earth Grow Thick*, by bell hooks et al. (Columbus, OH: Wexner Center for the Arts, 1996), 79.

others.³⁰ Just as the look of water discloses the place where the element appears “as yet without identity” (AW, 91), Cixous’ portraits attest to the material existence of black, where she too remains without image, and without name.³¹

The eroticism that informs the writer’s relation to the river equally suffuses the portraits in *Index Cixous*, which similarly tell of a desire to hold onto a series of moments shared with another, however mundane those moment might be. Looking for “the right spot (this spot) on the river,” the writer comments, “I always find the right spot – they’re everywhere” (AW, 234); in the portrait series, each of Cixous’ looks likewise appears right in every respect, as indicative of her truth as any other.³² *Index Cixous* and *Another Water* alike move the reader to drift from spot to spot, look to look, and image to image, staging a practice akin to watching moving water insofar as it similarly opens the possibility of thinking towards the opacity of the place in which one moves and is moved in relation to another, which is to say, towards the blackness to which differentiation itself attests.³³ Obscured by the to and fro that constitutes being-in-relation, black remains constant, invariable across variations in form, and visible only by virtue of being out of sight. As one note affirms, “black travels well, it’s inert, incorruptible – like gold. And no matter where it is, it’s always the same” (AW, 544). Black is the anchor for every movement, a dead

³⁰ Studying the images in Horn’s several portrait series, Cixous herself writes, “*These are not photographs*, these are portraits of looks that don’t allow themselves to be taken, snapshots of instants, series of winks of an eye.” For Cixous, Horn’s portraits do not represent individuals, but rather hint at the passage of near-imperceptible moments. Cixous, “Portraits of Portraits: The Very Day/Light of Roni Horn,” 75.

³¹ “Let us not be mistaken, she does not do the portrait of H       Cixous or Isabelle Huppert. She captures the charm-pearl of unknown women, who speak to her under the names. Under the book in H       Cixous, under the image in Isabelle Huppert, this is what interests her: the emanation, the essential core, the tear of the secret, the *je ne sais quoi*, which makes the Face.” Cixous, 78.

³² Horn’s photography consistently aligns the genre of portraiture with landscape. For a discussion of how Horn complicates the relation between the two in her *To Place* series, see Mark Godfrey, “Roni Horn’s Icelandic Encyclopedia,” in *Photography After Conceptual Art*, ed. Diarmuid Costello and Margaret Iverson (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 117–20.

³³ The “drift” I refer to is therefore comparable to the drift that Barthes speaks of when he writes, “*Drifting* occurs whenever *I do not respect the whole*, and whenever, by dint of seeming driven about by language’s illusions, seductions, and intimidations, like a cork on the waves, I remain motionless, pivoting on the *intractable* bliss that binds me to the text (to the world).” Here, the place that is black is precisely the place of bliss, which Barthes refers to elsewhere as “that immense subjective loss.” Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 18–19, 59.

weight that keeps all manners of being bound to a place that registers nothing but the loss that comes with being in relation, that is, the loss that accompanies every movement towards presence.³⁴ Arguably, *Index Cixous* offers a figure for this place of stasis: the blank page. Scattered throughout the images, white pages introduce pauses into the series, erratically interrupting its flow. If, like the space between frames on a filmstrip, the space between each of the images attests to moments of unseen movement, these blank intrusions, in contrast, evoke the inertia of a place that lies outside the continuous flux of becoming; they evoke instants of arrested breath in the midst of a breathless pursuit.³⁵ With these blank pages, *Index Cixous* suggests that the lure of black is at once a drive towards immobility in the midst of movement, an erotics, in a sense, of moving in place. The draw of moving water, they suggest, partly lies in this conjunction of stillness and movement, or rather, in the fact, as one note points out, that “when you go down to the river you’re killing two birds with one stone: you stand there and you go places” (AW 193).³⁶

In *Another Water*, an expanse of whiteness intermittently replaces the images of water, similarly disrupting a flow that would otherwise circulate round the book unremittingly. On the right-hand side of each of these double-page spreads, transcriptions of police reports appear above the running stream of notes. The reports each detail the circumstances surrounding the discovery of a dead body in the Thames. In addition to identifying the name, age, height, and

³⁴ I am indebted, here, to Kaufman’s theorization of an “inertia of being,” or an “ontology of inaction.” Discussing a tradition of literature that centers on mobility, she writes, “perhaps such movement, such infinite becoming, is equally the mask for the inertia that is so entrenched as to become invisible.” I see a similar concealment of stasis in Horn’s description of black in relation to water. Kaufman, *Deleuze, The Dark Precursor*, 166–68.

³⁵ In this regard, these blank pages appear to mirror the blackness of what lies outside the frame of each image, that is, what comes to be affected by the manner in which Cixous sees, thinks, or comes to appear, from the bodies and things in Cixous’ immediate environs, to the reader, who similarly enters into a kind of conversation with the images, or rather, comes to be moved by the manner in which each image appears (even if moved to boredom).

³⁶ Kaufman argues that “it is at the specific point where movement and immobility are shown to be *perceptually the same* that a new *form* of thought is produced.” I wonder if something similar is at work in the movement traced by the photographs in *Index Cixous* and *Another Water*. Kaufman, *Deleuze, The Dark Precursor*, 134–36.

defining features of the deceased, each report catalogues the clothes worn by the dead, lists the possessions found on their person, notes how and where their body was spotted, and describes the damage wrought on their figure by the currents and traffic of the river. Some of the reports also cite testimony or other evidence that confirms the death as a suicide. If, as one note points out, the paper that supports each photograph of water “floats the image of water or facilitates it,” then the paper that makes up these page spreads floats the remains of lives taken by, or rather, abandoned to the Thames. Death, like black water, washes up on the shores of the visible only as a thing it is not, say, as a corpse, a photograph, a word, or any other material form. “If this paper was water, it would be black” (AW, 219), one note reads, implying that whatever appears on or as the surface of each page attests to the place from which everything, including the reader, remains excluded, a place, to quote another note, “that can only admit you by disregarding you” (AW, 109). Parting the series of images as bodies would part a river, the dead body reports appear to mark this place as nothing other than the place of death, that is, the place where beings exist as lost, dissolved, or disappeared by the force of black water. “Disappearance: that’s why suicides are attracted to it,” one note remarks of the river, “It’s a soft entrance to simply not being here” (AW, 2). Floating on the blackness of the paper that makes up *Another Water*, the white surfaces that carry the words of each report arguably figure the condition of “simply not being here”; bringing the stream of different waters to a standstill, these stretches of white evoke both the stasis and the sameness of the place where the dead and lost lie.

A few of the notes in *Another Water* repeat some of the details cited in the reports that appear on the white double-page spreads. Others describe the state of other bodies found in the river. Still others relay the testimony of boatmen, who apparently see more suicides than they can remember. One boatman, for instance, “described the tendency of jumpers to stand on the

parapet of the bridge and stare down at the water for a while and then let go – face down into the river” (AW, 249). Along with the reports, these notes not only attest to the draw of disappearance, or rather, to what might be called the death drive, but also bring out the value of practices that offer an entrance to the place where modes of being with oneself and others come to be. Far from denying the attraction of black, a move that can only lead towards the violence that makes black water, which is to say, the violence that contaminates water with something other than itself, practices like watching the movement of a river, or questioning the look of images take place alongside, and as an engagement with the opacity that remains outside the possibility of relation. By documenting and staging such practices, *Another Water* shows that tracing the place where bodies come together to touch on a common opacity not only offers respite from both the world as it is given, and the self as it appears in relation to the latter, but also opens up the possibility of seeing and thinking otherwise. Given the allure of black, the task, the book suggests, is neither to renounce existence, nor to look towards the future, but rather to find the means to turn or think towards the place where loss and becoming, like black and water, appear to co-exist. Only moving towards the unliveable place where relations emerge can make for a present that is more than a hall of mirrors – more than reflection upon endless reflection occluding the possibility of as yet unthought ways of being with ourselves and others.

Epilogue:
Shared Solitude

Roni Horn's *Another Water* both traces and scripts a mode of thought that touches on the source of relationality, which is to say, on the scene that opens up the possibility of being with water.¹ When Horn finds herself, as she puts it "in the company of water" (AW, 82), she senses this scene in and as the blackness of water. The black part of water forever remains unseen and unthought, for it marks the very place where water comes to appear as such. Lured towards the opacity of this place in the act of watching water spiral or rush downstream, Horn attests to a capacity to look or move towards the space that founds the relation between viewer and view, the space that marks the emergence of terms and relations in general. As I discussed in the first chapter, Agamben identifies thought as a means to similarly turn towards or sense a place from which everything is radically excluded, or, to put it differently, a place that entirely consists of an absence or impossibility of relation. Recall that thought, as theorized by Agamben, necessarily entails an experience of potential, which is to say, an experience of how any given historical possibility comes to affect a being in the very act of becoming a subject.² To the extent that thinking engages the affective impact of any given act or event, or rather, engages the sense of loss, undoing, or dissolution that attends the movement by which the subject iteratively grounds or differentiates from itself, thought itself, Agamben argues, comes to attest to a power to not-be. This impotentiality, as he calls it, embodies a commonality that confounds the logic that would found the social on an originary exclusion.³ Earlier, I noted that this logic might be described as archival, for it condemns the subject to endlessly recuperate an infinitely retreating origin in the

¹ Horn, *Another Water* (*The River Thames, for Example*). Hereafter cited parenthetically, by footnote number, as AW.

² Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 210–11.

³ Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, 9–10.

service of knowledge. Archival logic, I suggested, thus forecloses the possibility of a sociality that would not rest on the exclusion of whatever bodies or modes of being remain, like black water, “as yet without identity” (AW, 91), unnameable, unintelligible, or unliveable at any given historical moment. For Agamben, thought is the paradigmatic means of “deactivating,” or neutralizing the structure of the archive from within.⁴

In *Another Water*, Horn similarly affirms a potential to disappear within the structure that would consign the source of terms and relations to an inaccessible sphere. This possibility or potential is apparent, for instance, when she notes the viewer’s capacity to see their own reflection disappear downstream. As I discussed in the last chapter, black water distances the viewer from their sense of self, exposing, in the place of their reflection, the opacity that marks the emergence of the viewer’s relation to the view. Black water, in this sense, troubles archival logic, for it brings the viewer in contact with the very ground of relation, or, more precisely, with an image that traces the very existence of water, before or beyond whatever a viewer might make of it.⁵ Horn similarly upholds a power to not-be in a note that describes how being near vast, undifferentiated surfaces of water affects one’s sense of measure. As might also be said of the photographs that appear in *Another Water*, she writes,

Large expanses of water are like deserts; no landmarks, no differences to distinguish here from there. (If you don’t know where you are, can you know who you are?) Just tumult everywhere, endlessly. Tumult modulating into another tumult all over and without end. The change is so constant, so pervasive, so relentless that identity, place, scale – all measures lessen, weaken – eventually disappear. The more time you spend around this water – the more faint your memories of measure become. (AW, 164)

⁴ Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 276–77.

⁵ Insofar as black water appears imperceptible, one might say that every image of black water exposes the force that embodies its source or ground, the latter of which, as Jean-Luc Nancy writes, “consists in its not appearing. One can thus say that it appears as what it is by disappearing. Disappearing as ground, it passes entirely into the image.” Nancy, “The Image - the Distinct,” 7–9.

The tumult that ceaselessly roils and rips across large bodies of water essentially erodes the viewer's capacity to work within the set of historical possibilities that would orient them in relation to the view; the relentlessly variable surface of turbulent waters, like any form of black water, makes for an image that disappears no sooner than it appears, forcing the viewer to face an impossibility of relation, or rather, to sense the attenuation of all terms that might forge a relation. In both of these instances, Horn affirms the viewer's potential to lose sight of the means by which to know themselves and others. She shows that the sensuous surface of water, ever intractable and infinitely mutable, in fact offers the means to experience a place that remains without relation, or, as she calls it, black, insofar as it marks the common undoing of viewer and view, or, more generally, the loss that originally coincides with becoming. As opposed to re-affirming the logic of the archive, then, *Another Water* both traces and implicates the reader in modes of seeing and knowing that engage the originary exclusion upon which relation depends. By documenting and staging a mode of thought that attests to a potential to not-be, Horn affirms the possibility of sensing an anonymous, impersonal space, that is, a space of sociality that remains outside, or free from the measures by which the world comes to be seen and known.

As I showed in the last chapter, Horn finds herself lured towards this space of undoing or unknowing in the act of watching water turn, flow, or flicker into and out of view. For Horn, in other words, the threat that water poses to the viewer's sense of self is an inseparable part of the element's allure. The tumultuous modulations of water do not simply fade Horn's "memories of measure" (AW, 164), but in fact whet her appetite to see more than she can see, or rather, to see outside the confines of the possible; the variable surface that marks the blackness of water provokes her to look towards the elusive movement or manner of being that not only defines the singular existence of water, but also traces the place of water's disappearance. "It's an attraction

that satisfies only as long as I watch,” she remarks of the way in which water draws, or better yet, commands her attention. “I am mesmerized, pacified, quenched – but only while I watch” (AW, 492). When Horn’s “gaze alights on the water,” she writes in the next note, “I feel myself pulled towards the water, incapable of turning away” (AW, 493). At the sight of water, Horn can not help but keep watching as it turns into depths unseen or rushes downstream; she watches to no other end than the satisfaction of watching itself, even as doing so rouses her desire to lose herself with it as it turns invisible or flows out of view, disappearing and appearing to its own time – her desire to pass fully into her perception of water, to give herself over to the movement by which the “I” that sees comes to affect and be affected by the seen.⁶ In the notes that describe her experience of watching spots on water, Horn attests, in other words, to a desire “to be sucked into the vortex of the origin,” to quote Agamben.⁷ Drawing on Walter Benjamin’s metaphor of the origin as a vortex in the stream of becoming, Agamben affirms that the origin need not be conceived as “something that precedes becoming and remains separate from it in chronology.”

He continues:

Like the whirlpool in the river’s flow, the origin is simultaneous with the becoming of phenomena, from which it derives its matter but in which it dwells in a somehow autonomous and stationary way [...] The *archē*, the whirling origin in the river’s flow, is a historical a priori that remains immanent to becoming and continues to act in it.⁸

To surrender to the manner in which water comes to appear with every passing moment is at once to experience the vortex that disappears beings in the act of becoming. If watching water alone soothes Horn’s attraction to the element, it is only insofar as the act of looking itself comes to be whirled into the origin, or rather, comes to open onto the *archē*, a historical a priori that

⁶ Following Haver, we might say that water, for Horn, “calls forth a seeing that is also something other than the gaze of a subject [...] It is not that there is a subject who willingly exercises the faculty of perception, but that the I – pun intended – is *nothing but* that perception, that seeing.” William Haver, “The Art of Dirty Old Men: Rembrandt, Giacometti, Genet,” *Parallax* 11, no. 2 (April 2005): 32.

⁷ Giorgio Agamben, “Vortexes,” in *The Fire and the Tale* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 60.

⁸ Agamben, 59–60.

swallows up every being caught in its current even as it offers them to be sensed in their infinite dispersion, and singular multiplicity.⁹ If Horn is lured towards black, it is only insofar as the source of terms and relations holds out the experience of an intimacy that takes place not in the form of relation, but rather in and as the dissolution of identities and relations – a dissolution that registers the sensuous impact of being in the company of water, or, more generally, the erotics of coming to terms with others.

Just as the surface of water brings Horn in contact with an opacity that lies outside the possibility of relation, in excess of sight and thought alike, so, in *Nox*, the surface of language moves Carson to sense a muteness that remains untranslatable, on the outskirts of both the sayable and the visible.¹⁰ Words confront Carson with an intractable quality of being no less than the water confronts Horn with an existence beyond her reach. Unlike Horn, however, Carson neither expresses a desire for disappearance, nor suggests that any comfort might lie in invisibility or not-seeing; in the very place where Horn suggests one might find “relief from the unending demands of simple sight” (AW, 6), Carson experiences only exile, and the ceaseless groping of an endless task. While Horn traces the means to look and think towards black, that is, towards the place of an existence that remains withdrawn, Carson, in *Nox*, appears to already write from out of that unseen place. As I showed in the second chapter, *Nox* bears witness to Carson’s being consigned, from the start, to the darkness of a space that exceeds the work of both meaning and mourning; both the form and content of *Nox* attest to her exclusion or exile not only from language, but also from the history she presents as her own. Horn and Carson, in this

⁹ Huffer similarly alludes to the vortex-like (vortical?) quality of Foucault’s historical a priori when she notes that it both “*binds us* to the field of transformations that is our ground,” and “*unbinds us* through our contact with the alterity that is time’s dispersion.” She argues that this dynamic of binding and unbinding, or making and unmaking constitutes the condition for what she calls “an ethics of eros.” The erotic here coincides with the desubjectification that attends the becoming of the subject. Lynne Huffer, “Strange Eros: Foucault, Ethics, and the Historical a Priori,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 49, no. 1 (2016): 103–114.

¹⁰ Carson, *Nox*.

sense, each pass from one form of exteriority to another, or perhaps, from one form of solitude to another: from the solitude of a world made in the image of thought, to the solitude of a space without relation, a space, therefore, that forecloses even the possibility of self-presence.¹¹ On the one hand, Horn feels herself lured towards a place of radical exclusion in the act of watching water, or, more precisely, by tracing the manner in which water appears with every passing moment, while, on the other hand, Carson hungers for a way out of the exile to which her body has already been sentenced; in the act of translating and by means of historical labour alike, she prowls for an entrance back into the landscape of the seen and the known, or rather, for an exit from the obscurity in which she finds herself deprived of both the power to speak and the potential to see.

Horn's interminable approach towards black, and Carson's ceaseless flight from the room might be said to capture the opposing forces at play in the scene of relationality, which takes place, the books affirm, as a moment of withdrawal as much as appearance, of unbecoming as much as a thrust towards presence. Indeed, in both cases, the same space is at issue, namely, a space in which one might find common ground with the unseen, unnamed, or untranslatable. *Another Water* and *Nox* alike show that the surface of both images and language opens onto, or better yet, exists as an opening onto an experience of being at a loss, or, more precisely, of being without the terms by which oneself and others might come to be seen and known. In this respect, the opacity towards which Horn moves and out from which Carson writes resembles what Maurice Blanchot describes as "the essential solitude," a form of solitude in which nothing but

¹¹ I borrow my phrasing here from Birnbaum, who writes of a movement "from one outside to the other" in her discussion of Jean-Luc Nancy's reading and reformulation of Descartes' distinction between the *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. Birnbaum describes the former as "nothing but the extremity of a withdrawal; is it simply outside extension," and the latter as a "self exposed in accord with corporeal exteriority, and thus exposed to others." I see something of a similar dynamic in Horn's and Carson's movements of thought. Antonia Birnbaum, "To Exist Is to Exit the Point," in *Corpus* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2008), 149.

the effacement by which the “I” positions itself over and against others comes to appear as such. Blanchot writes, “In action, true action – the action which is history’s unfolding – concealment tends to become negation (the negative is our task, and this task is the task of truth). But in what we call the essential solitude, concealment tends to appear.”¹² *Another Water* and *Nox* alike affirm the possibility of sensing this essential form of solitude, for they show that images and words, far from each referring to some negated essence, in fact bear witness to an existence defined by occlusion or opacity itself.¹³ The place that is black and the room that is translating both suggest a solitude that neither affirms the interiority of a self, nor expresses the mastery of the subject, but rather exposes, as Carson says of her brother’s muteness, a “fundamental opacity of human being,” a non-visibility and unintelligibility that remains in the absence of each seeing and speaking subject, or rather, remains in the wake of the subject’s dissolution or disappearance.¹⁴ As Blanchot asserts elsewhere, “Where I am alone, I am not there; no one is there, but the impersonal is: the outside, as that which prevents, precedes, and dissolves the possibility of any personal relation.”¹⁵ There where the subject is lacking, or, as Horn might say, where “identity, place, scale – all measures lessen, weaken – eventually disappear” (AW, 164), unmarked, impersonal being stands alone. Horn and Carson, respectively undone by the act of watching water and translating, each come to attest to the singular manner in which they

¹² Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 253.

¹³ To write, Blanchot says, is “to stay in touch, through language, in language, with the absolute milieu where the thing becomes image again, where the image, instead of alluding to some particular feature, becomes an allusion to the featureless, and instead of a form drawn upon absence, becomes the formless presence of this absence, the opaque, empty opening onto that which is when there is no more world, when there is no world yet.” The practice or mode of thought traced and staged by *Another Water* and *Nox* arguably touches upon a similar “milieu,” a space where “the formless presence of [...] absence” appears as such. Blanchot, 33.

¹⁴ In this respect, looking towards black and translating might each be described, as Bersani writes of “attempted escapes from the cultural conferring of legitimacy and nonlegitimacy,” as a potential means to “bring the subject back to an aloneness that is different from the conquering autonomy towards which the Cartesian subject aspires, and that may be the precondition for new points of entry into a hospitable otherness to which we have always (if unknowingly) belonged.” Bersani, *Thoughts and Things*, xi; Carson, *Nox*, section 1.3.

¹⁵ Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 31, 250.

experience the outside; touched by the essential solitude of that which lies outside the possibility of relation, they are each forced to turn towards or reach out from a place of radical obscurity.

At the same time, *Nox* and *Another Water* show that the mute body or opacity that appears in the essential solitude sustains the social as such. The muteness of the outlived or the place that is black keeps the question of how to be with others open, or rather, re-opens the space or scene of relationality with every passing moment. The obscurity that is the impersonal grounds the endlessness of Carson and Horn's respective tasks, for, by forcibly calling into question the manner in which others come to be seen, said, or known, it forever distances each of them from the beings they long to capture.¹⁶ Both books, furthermore, implicate the reader in the writers' tasks, or, more precisely, present the means by which the reader, too, comes to share the task of looking towards or prowling for an existence that infinitely eludes the reach of thought, and obstinately remains out of sight. Indeed, insofar as *Another Water* and *Nox* respectively script a reading that mirrors Horn's approach towards the unliveable place that marks the source of relations, and stage a reading that replicates Carson's encounter with, and experience of muteness, the books affirm that reading itself opens onto, or rather takes places as an engagement with an essential solitude. The books show, in other words, that every reader, like each writer, can make sense of the visible or the legible only to the extent that they simultaneously trace a return to a space that marks an impossibility of seeing, reading, or translating, an impossibility that might be described, to quote Blanchot, as a "fundamental passivity where the word" – or the image – "no longer anything but its appearance – the shadow

¹⁶ Or again, as Blanchot writes, the essential solitude "makes what is ungraspable inescapable; it never lets me cease reaching what I cannot attain. And that which I cannot take, I must take up again, never to let go." To be precise, the subject of this quotation – the "it" – is that which is present in the space or "time of time's absence." Blanchot seems to suggest that the impersonal being that corresponds to the essential solitude is precisely the obscure presence that exists in this time. Blanchot, 31.

of a word – never can be mastered or even grasped” (SL 25).¹⁷ Even as this space marks the place of a shared task, then, each reader comes to experience it alone, in and as the scene in which they separately come to be affected by the act of reading.¹⁸ Seen in this light, what Blanchot calls the essential solitude appears at once to disclose a space so intimate as to be unspeakable, and to delineate a sociality founded on nothing but a common receptivity, an openness to others or to otherness that might be figured, for example, by the opacity of a page that floats a photograph, or as an empty box that bears a book.

Agamben describes the synchronicity of solitude and sociality in slightly different terms. He writes,

“Alone by oneself” is an expression of intimacy. We are together and very close, but between us there is not an articulation or a relation that unites us. We are united to one another in the form of our being alone. What customarily constitutes the sphere of privacy here becomes public and common.¹⁹

For Agamben, we are each “alone by oneself” or “alone with one alone,” which is to say, each isolated from ourselves as much as each other, or rather, sentenced to exist outside ourselves as much as others. To be together, here, is to constitute oneself in relation to the solitude of another, that is, in relation to a mode of being to which no one can lay claim. The formulation “alone by oneself,” then, recasts the interiority or “privacy” of the subject as an intimate otherness shared amongst others.²⁰ “What is common is never a property, but only the inappropriable,” Agamben writes elsewhere, further affirming a togetherness that would arise neither between self-possessed subjects, nor, correlatively, in the form of a relation, but rather by means of a mutual

¹⁷ Blanchot, 24–25.

¹⁸ In other words, reading here appears to affirm, as Haver argues, that “there is no common apart from a sense of the common; there is no sense of the common apart from the question of the common; and there could be no question of the common apart from the aesthetic determinations of partisans in their trajectories toward the singularity of their disappearance.” Haver, “A Sense of the Common,” 451.

¹⁹ Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 237–38.

²⁰ Agamben draws the formulation “alone with one alone” from Plotinus. Agamben, 91–92, 234–36.

partaking in that which exceeds the mastery of every being.²¹ In the first chapter, I discussed select scenes in Garth Greenwell's novel *What Belongs to You* to trace an intimacy that similarly comes to pass in and as a non-relational space between solitary beings.²² The narrator seems to express the lonesomeness that attends the experience of such an intimacy when, for instance, he recalls that his father's "withdrawal didn't diminish our closeness but deepened it, it was a sign of vulnerability and trust, like an animal turning its back" (WB, 70). In withdrawing from the narrator as from the world, the narrator's father not only makes room for his son to ponder his sense of the scene they share, that is, to withdraw into himself in turn, but also attests to his own solitude, or rather, exposes the manner in which he alone comes to be affected by contemplating the night sky overhead. Far from affirming a bond based on the recognition of the other, then, the narrator here traces a form of togetherness all the more profound for resting on more than mutual understanding (or, as it may be, misunderstanding); insofar as his father's retreat discloses the distance between solitary beings, it registers the intimacy that comes from being "alone with one alone," that is, from sharing the manner in which one comes to be moved by oneself with one who shares their solitude in turn. The solitude of one meets the solitude of another in the intimacy of this scene without relation.

In his account of his evening with K., the narrator similarly alludes to a correspondence between intimacy and solitude. He and K., he recalls, had wandered through the streets of his neighborhood before finding themselves in each other's arms. Referring to his nightly habit of sneaking out of the house, he writes,

I did this almost every night, though there was no reason for it, I had nowhere to go, we lived in the suburbs and every street was the same. Nor was there any point to the secrecy, since by that time my father had largely if not yet finally washed his hands of me and I could do as I liked. But it was crucial somehow that I sneak out, that I disappear

²¹ Agamben, 93.

²² Greenwell, *What Belongs to You*. Hereafter cited parenthetically as WB.

from my room without anyone knowing, beyond the reach of the authority I chafed under at every other moment of the day, at school and at home; it was only out on these walks that I felt I could relax the guard I kept at every other moment. Whatever the weather I went out and wandered, and now I wandered with K.; I introduced him to my solitude and he deepened it without disturbance. (WB 77)

Just as watching the stars from an open field once let his father drop his defenses, so slipping out of the house offers the narrator the means to inhabit a hospitable space, a space in which he can freely expose how being in the world comes to affect him. Wandering alone at night, he practices how to stay true to his singular mode of being, that is, to the manner in which he is moved by any given possibility of doing or thinking, rather than how to constitute himself as a subject under the sign of any given authority or institution – familial or otherwise. In this regard, disappearing from his room lets the narrator leave himself behind, lets him sense himself as he exists outside of the terms by which he might come to be seen and known.²³ Spending time outside of his home, or “beyond the reach of [...] authority,” in other words, brings him in touch with something like the room that is translating as presented in *Nox*, a space without relation that offers the sense of one’s existence apart from the world of others. Being with K., the narrator suggests, only intensifies this experience of being without others. Rather than annulling the narrator’s solitude, the company of K. makes his lonesomeness ever more profound, or rather, draws him even closer to the pleasures of walking on his own. If the narrator is indeed isolated from his friend as from others, it is only insofar as wandering with K. delivers him to the way in which wandering those suburban streets affects him, and simultaneously forces him to respond to that affection in turn. K.’s company moves the narrator to sink even deeper into his sense of what happens during their time together; his solitude attests to his receptivity and exposure to others,

²³ I take the phrasing “leave himself behind” from Bersani, who writes of a certain “self-subtraction” as the precondition for a mode of sociality grounded upon an otherness that remains “unlocatable within differences that can be known or enumerated,” an otherness not unlike that to be found in muteness or the place that is black. Leo Bersani, “Sociability and Cruising,” in *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 60–61.

just as his father's retreat signaled his vulnerability and trust.²⁴ In this sense, the narrator practices a solitude that expresses his intimacy with his environs as much as his friend.

Wandering with K. brings him in touch with an aloneness that deepens in tandem with intimacy, or rather, as on those nights with his father under the stars, with a closeness that deepens in and as the introduction of one solitude to another.

With his father as with K., then, the narrator attests to a form of solitude that tells of his immersion in a scene shared with others, or, to return to Agamben's metaphor, of his being drawn into the originary vortex that accompanies becoming. The narrator occasionally withdraws into this form of solitude well beyond his childhood years.²⁵ As I suggested in the first chapter, for instance, he continues to take refuge from himself and from others by losing himself on his still habitual walks, which punctuate the narrative with scenes that evince both an engagement with the sensuous qualities of the world, and an attentiveness to the manner in which those qualities move him. For the duration of these walks, the narrator appears to embody the singular manner in which he comes into contact with the world and others, or, to quote Bersani out of context, "he *is*, briefly, the contact between himself and the world"; he leaves his story behind in favor of experiencing the solitude of paths not of his making, paths that he shares with untold others.²⁶ When, as discussed earlier, the narrator watches the fly on the bus, touches K., or takes notes on the boy on the train, he similarly alludes to a closeness that comes not from securing a

²⁴ The form of solitude I am attempting to sketch out, then, affirms the following claim by Morin: "What is most inside me is not some me that would finally coincide with itself but always something more or other than me that exceeds any identity, distances me from myself and opens me up to relation." Morin, "How Do We Live Here?: Abyssal Intimacies in Jean-Luc Nancy's *La Vile Au Loin*," 115.

²⁵ Insofar as the narrator's solitude offers a kind of refuge, it might bear a resemblance to what Genet calls solitude. In his essay on Giacometti's work, Genet writes, "it seems to me that Giacometti's statues have withdrawn – abandoning the shore – to that secret place, which I can neither describe nor clarify, but which causes each man, when he takes refuge in it, to be more precious than the rest of the world." Jean Genet and Charlotte Mandell, "The Studio of Alberto Giacometti," in *Fragments of the Artwork* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 63–64.

²⁶ Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 120.

relation to another, but rather from responding to the affective impact of being-with another. On each of these occasions, the narrator, much like Horn and Carson in the act of watching water and translating respectively, at once attests to the singularity of a body, or rather, to the intractable quality of a being, and, as discussed earlier, discloses an irreducible distance between himself and whatever comes to transfix him. These episodes all evince the narrator's capacity to experience his solitude in and as a form of intimacy that exceeds relation, an intimacy that affirms the impossibility of knowing the other. If, following his falling out with father, the narrator "retreated into an uneasy solitude from which I've never emerged" (WB, 73), that is, into a solitude that bespeaks his alienation from the world and others, then, on these exemplary occasions, he makes use of that exclusion not only to practice a non-appropriative mode of being-with others, but also to embody his experience of being without others, or rather, to fashion himself in response to that experience.

When it comes to being with Mitko, however, the narrator expresses a far more ambivalent relation to solitude. Certainly, he often loses himself in his sense of Mitko's body, as when he sinks so deep into the sensuous impact of his scent that "it put(s) an end to my thinking" (WB, 9), or when, sensing Mitko's approach, he feels the collapse of his resistance, which, he writes, "was swept aside when I felt the sudden warmth of Mitko behind me" (WB 133). On these occasions, pleasure dispossesses the narrator of himself, interrupting his thoughts and dismantling his defenses; in these instances, being with Mitko exposes the narrator to the impossibility of making sense of his desires, or rather, brings him in contact with the opacity of the scene from which relations emerge, a scene, accordingly, that simultaneously forecloses the possibility of relation. On other occasions, the narrator further affirms that Mitko, for all his bodily candor, had always remained at a distance, as withdrawn as black water might appear to a

viewer. A few weeks after meeting him, for example, the narrator remarks, “Never before had I met anyone who combined such transparency (or the semblance of transparency) with such mystery, so that he seemed at once overexposed and hidden behind impervious defenses” (WB, 15). Even when Mitko goes beyond or fails to meet the terms of their transactions, that is, even when he appears to act outside the strictures of their relationship, his “true face” (WB, 18, 37, 72), as the narrator calls it, remains a question, as though that truth were as changeable as the look of water, or as false as the image that he would make of the boy on the train (WB 170).²⁷ At other times, however, the narrator betrays an impulse to efface, close, or, as I suggested in the first chapter, pretend away the space of unknowing that distances him from Mitko as well as himself. Having watched a man and his young daughter embrace for some time, for instance, he tells himself that being with Mitko eases “the sense of dislocation I so often feel,” a sense precipitated, he implies, by an originary loss: “And so it is, I thought then, as the man and his child released each other and moved away from the water, so it is that at the very moment we come into full consciousness of ourselves what we experience is leave-taking and a loss we seek the rest of our lives to restore” (WB, 34). Not only is the narrator’s solitude here cast as an unfortunate effect of loss, rather than an essential condition, but Mitko is framed as nothing but a replacement for what essentially remains irreplaceable, reduced to an object that will inevitably fail to mend the narrator’s constitutive wound.²⁸ Later, the narrator suggests that this wound, further, might be identified with the loss of his bond to his father, a loss that moved him to feel “as though I lost something of myself as well, as though I became somehow less real as my

²⁷ The narrator’s recurrent mention of things “both true and false at once” suggests, as Haver writes, that “the relation of truth to falsity, [...] presentation to representation, is one of simultaneity, a distinctly non-dialectical relation of non-relation; truth is *immanent* in falsity, [...] presentation in representation.” Haver, “The Art of Dirty Old Men: Rembrandt, Giacometti, Genet,” 32; Greenwell, *What Belongs to You*, 170.

²⁸ As Adam Phillips writes, “Love as recovery – love as restoration of the earlier self [...] – is bound to be a furious project; as though sexual development was about waiting for an opportunity to get everything back that one had lost in the process of development. And in the full knowledge, as it were, that such restitution is impossible.” Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, *Intimacies* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 102.

father withdrew from me, less substantial or less certain of my substance, as though I too were something that might dissolve.” If Horn is drawn to desire her own dissolution, that is, to look or move towards the place of water’s withdrawal, then the narrator, in these instances, seems to see his undoing as a misfortune in need of repair. It is not surprising, in this respect, that he sometimes seems to relish the claim he has the privilege of purchasing on Mitko’s body. After Mitko introduces him to another one of his clients via Skype, for instance, the narrator asserts, “Mitko was still mine for the night, there were still hours in which he was bound by our phantom contract; I could still enjoy the desire this man was counting on as his own [...] I felt something of the jealousy of ownership, even though my ownership was temporary, wasn’t really ownership at all” (WB, 28). The narrator knows that Mitko’s desire can not be owned, that, in a sense, he has purchased the fiction of ownership along with Mitko’s time, but still he responds to the claim of another by guarding what he takes as his possession for the night; if he acknowledges that his every transaction with Mitko opens onto something “infinitely dear” (WB, 8), as he writes of Mitko’s body the first time they meet, he nevertheless bristles when that dearness appears out of his control, in danger of slipping out of reach. Far from delivering himself to an experience of dispossession or separation, the narrator, in this instance, appears to respond to his sense of the inappropriable with an attempt to secure, or at least re-affirm the terms of the relationship that express his claim, however temporary, on Mitko.

If Horn longs to turn invisible with turning waters as they spiral out of sight, and Carson, having already disappeared in the act of translating, craves ever more entries to the luminous realm of the seen and the said, then the narrator alternately loses himself in the intimacy of a world without meaning, and defends himself against the solitude to be found with others in the place where relations emerge. *What Belongs to You* may recount the ebbs and flows of the

narrator's relationship with Mitko, but it equally traces the narrator's tendency to shuttle between these two modes of being with others, a tendency that comes to the fore in the varying ways in which he responds to being in relation with Mitko. Even the narrator's jealous attempts at ownership, however, attest to an irremediable distance between himself and Mitko, a distance that simultaneously isolates the one from the other, and embodies, or rather, takes the form of a shared scene, a scene that marks the place of being-in-common. In the concluding moments of the book, the narrator himself affirms this distance. Gazing down at Mitko from his apartment balcony, watching him walk towards the corner where he would soon disappear from view, the narrator sees him approach a child sleeping in the arms of her mother. During his time in Bulgaria, the narrator notes, he had often observed "the freedom with which people addressed small children [...] as though it were granted that children were a kind of public property, something to be cherished in common" (WB 189-90); however, when Mitko leaned in to address the child, the mother protectively turned away from him, "as if shielding the girl from his interest, and then the father was beside them, ushering them toward their building's door" (WB 190). Upon seeing Mitko so rebuffed, the narrator remarks,

He had always been alone, I thought, gazing at a world in which he had never found a place and that was now almost perfectly indifferent to him; he was incapable even of disturbing it, or making a sound it could be bothered to hear. Suddenly I was enraged for him, I felt the anger I was sure he must feel, that futile anger like a dry grinding of gears. But from a distance Mitko didn't seem to feel anything at all; these were only my own thoughts, I knew, they brought me no nearer to him, this man I had in some sense loved and who had never in the years I had known him been anything but alien to me. (WB, 190)

The distance to which the narrator here alludes certainly stems, in part, from the social and cultural differences that had informed the dynamics of his relationship with Mitko from the start, differences that have finally come to mark Mitko in such a way that the world itself seems to have disregarded him, or even to have left him for dead, "incapable [...] of making a sound it

could be bothered to hear.” However, the narrator equally gestures towards a difference that exceeds the factual circumstances of each of their lives, an irreducible foreignness that appears, or rather, becomes palpable as the solitude of thought. As the narrator affirms, his thoughts trace how he alone had responded to the scene at hand; far from bridging the space between himself and Mitko, that is, far from affirming the mastery of the seeing or knowing subject, his thoughts only bring him in touch with an impossibility of thinking, an impossibility that he comes to sense in and as the opacity of the man he once loved, someone, as he says, who “had never in the years I had known him been anything but alien to me.” In the final moments of the novel, then, the narrator seems to point towards the act of narrating itself; he suggests that his words will have only ever registered the singular manner in which he had come, within the limits of the possible, to make sense of or present the affective impact of being with others. He intimates, in other words, that his voice, as expressed by his “I,” and his story, as told over the course of the novel, will have only ever registered the distance to which thought attests, or rather, will have only ever affirmed an unbridgeable divide between himself and others; thinking itself, he affirms, unfolds from out of a place of exclusion, or rather, opens onto a space of non-relation. In this respect, he too leaves Mitko to a certain form of solitude; however, he does so neither out of indifference nor to safeguard the world that would carelessly cast him out, but rather in recognition of Mitko’s singularity, as if to affirm the value of Mitko’s existence apart from whatever he or the world would make of him.²⁹ Even if the narrator looks away from the future that he and Mitko might share, turning away from him much like the mother with her child, these closing words suggest that his thoughts, as presented in *What Belongs to You*, trace an attempt to listen to

²⁹ Blanchot writes that the reader “is close to the work to the degree that he recognizes it as a work regardless of him”; he affirms that the distance between the reader and the work is in fact “the measure of his intimacy with the work.” I wonder if the narrator acknowledges something of this intimacy in his relationship with Mitko. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 200–201.

Mitko's unheard sounds as such. Certainly, his words attest to a form of aloneness that rests not on differences that might be identified, but rather on a common incapacity to know or speak for any other, an incapacity that opens the possibility of hearing what remains unsaid.

No less than *Nox* or *Another Water*, then, *What Belongs to You* presents the scene of relationality as a space of experimentation. Not only within the context of the narrative, but also in the very presentation or sharing of his thoughts, the narrator appears to grapple with, work through, or test out various modes of being with himself and others, even as those others, as well as the truth of his own desires, remain withdrawn, as opaque as black water or the muteness of the dead, and at a distance as fine as thought itself. If *Nox* brings the reader in touch with the muteness of outlived bodies, and *Another Water* turns the reader's gaze towards the unseen and unnamed, then *What Belongs to You* draws attention to the intimacy that comes from the solitude of thought, or rather, to the closeness that comes to be sensed in and as the space between separate beings, in and as an experience of being without others. Greenwell's novel may not stage a reading that mirrors the narrator's practice, but, in this respect, it gestures towards a reading that would engage the very place of thought, which is to say, the place that simultaneously registers one's intimacy with, and isolation from the world of others – one's receptivity and singularity at once. Much like *Another Water* and *Nox*, *What Belongs to You* suggests that being-in-relation, or rather, thinking itself, carves out a dark space in the landscape of the seen and the known. To experience this space, be it in the act of looking, translating, touching, or reading, is to touch upon the place where an essential passivity or potential to not-be upends every act, a place where bodies sink so deep into the sense of being with others, that each one loses sight of where one ends and others begin.

Figures

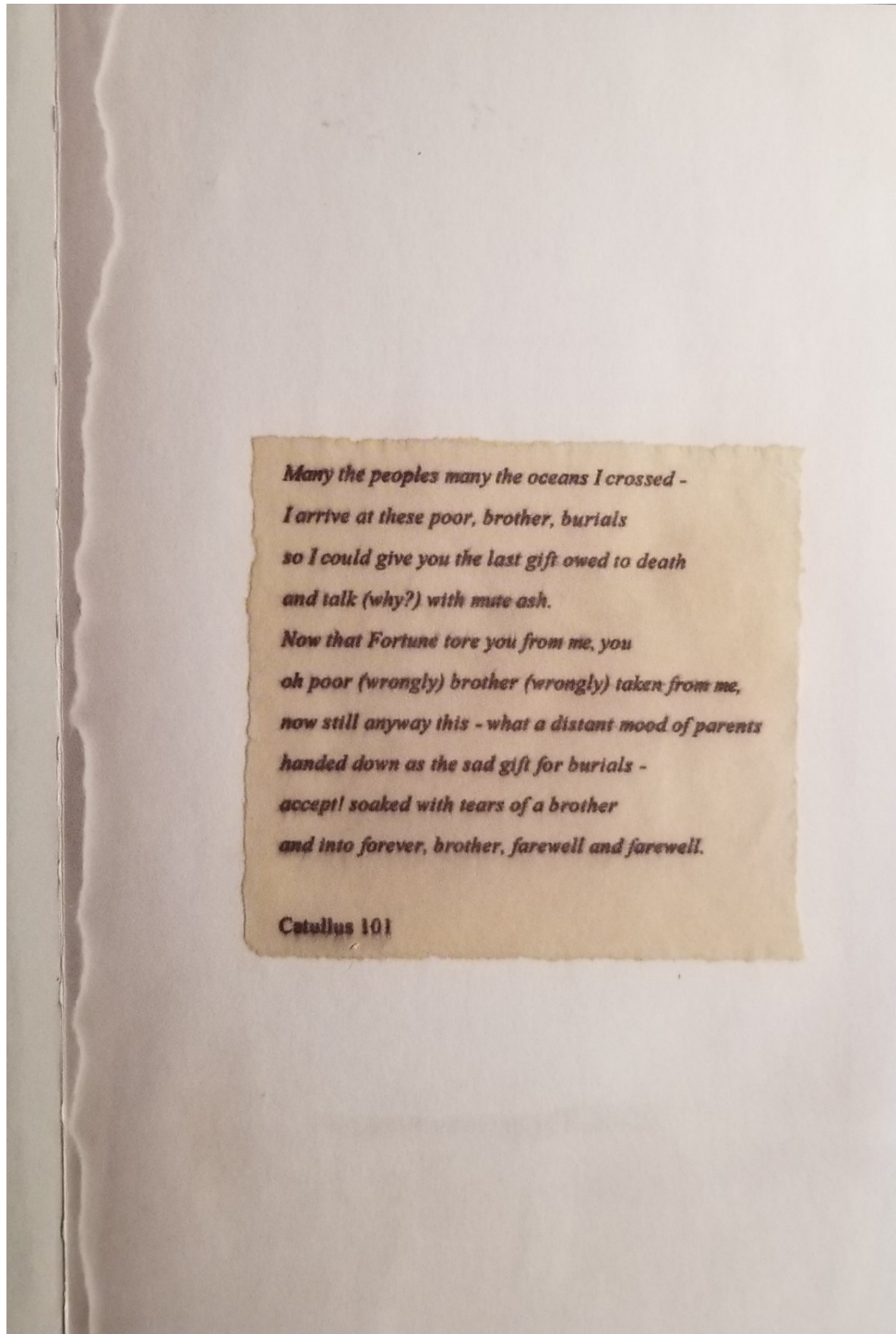


Figure 1: Unnumbered page. By Anne Carson, from NOX, copyright ©2010 by Anne Carson. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

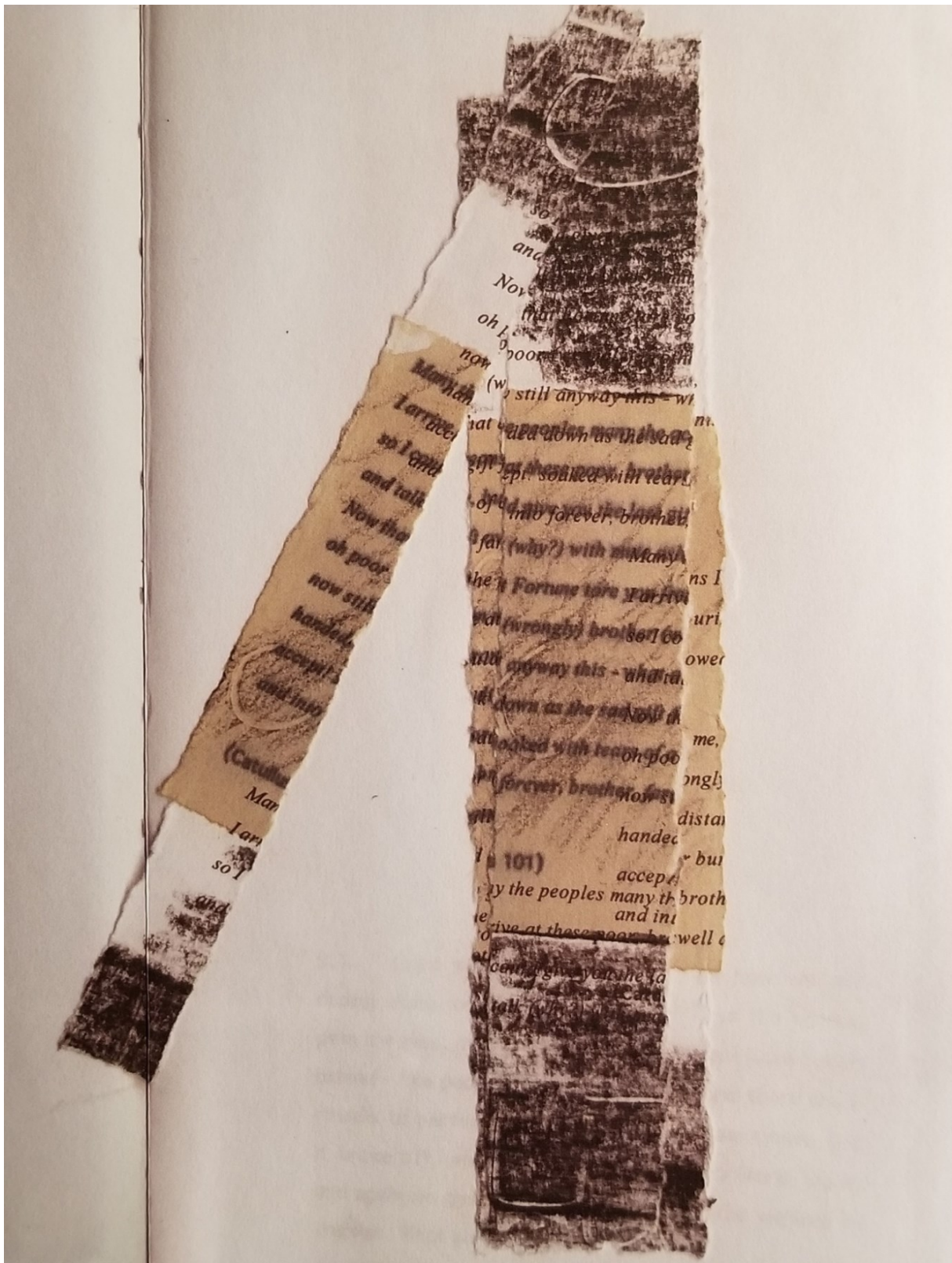


Figure 2: Unnumbered page. By Anne Carson, from NOX, copyright ©2010 by Anne Carson. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

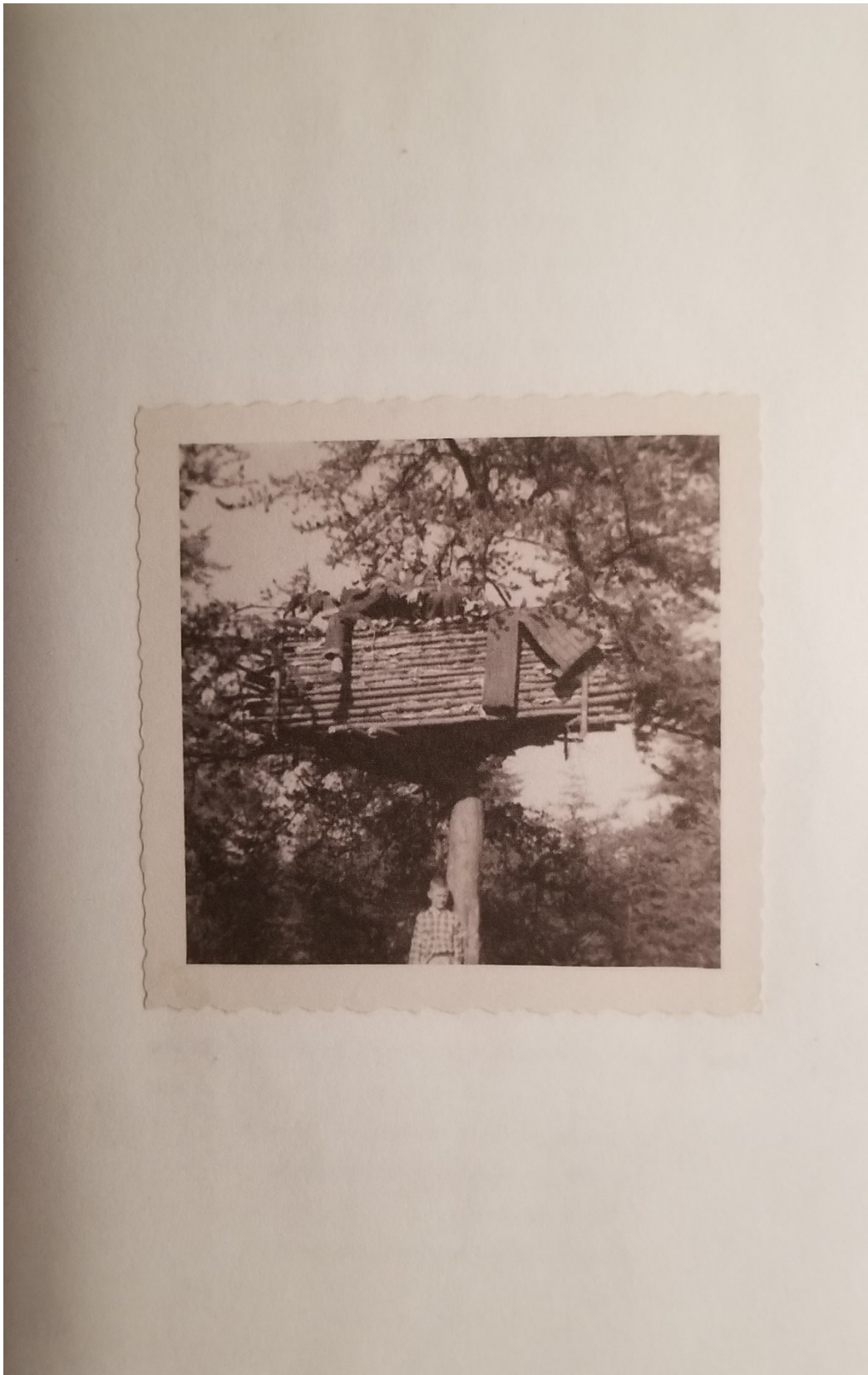


Figure 3: Unnumbered page. By Anne Carson, from NOX, copyright ©2010 by Anne Carson.
Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

Bibliography

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- . *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*. Translated by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- . “On Potentiality.” In *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen, 177–84. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- . “Pardes.” In *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen, 205–19. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- . “Philosophical Archaeology.” In *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 81–111. Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2009.
- . *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. New York, NY: Zone Books, 1999.
- . *The Coming Community*. Translated by Michael Hardt. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- . *The Use of Bodies*. Translated by Adam Kotsko. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016.
- . “Vortexes.” In *The Fire and the Tale*, 57–62. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017.
- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1982.
- . “Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein.” In *Image - Music - Text*, translated by Stephen Heath, 69–78. New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1977.
- . “The Death of the Author.” In *Image - Music - Text*, translated by Stephen Heath, 142–48. New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1977.
- . *The Pleasure of the Text*. Translated by Richard Miller. NY, New York: Hill and Wang, 1975.
- Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.
- Berlant, Lauren, and Lee Edelman. *Sex, or the Unbearable*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Bersani, Leo. *Homos*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- . *Is The Rectum a Grave?* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- . “Psychoanalysis and the Aesthetic Subject.” In *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays*, 139–53. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- . “Sociability and Cruising.” In *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays*, 45–62. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- . *Thoughts and Things*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015.
- Bersani, Leo, and Adam Phillips. *Intimacies*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Birnbaum, Antonia. “To Exist Is to Exit the Point.” In *Corpus*, 145–49. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2008.
- Bishop, Claire. “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics.” *October*, no. 110 (2004): 51–80.
- Blanchot, Maurice. *The Space of Literature*. Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska Press, 1955.

- Borggreen, Gunhild, and Rune Gade, eds. *Performing Archives, Archives of Performance*. Copenhagen, Denmark: Museum Tusculanum, 2013.
- Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. Translated by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods. Paris, France: Les presses du réel, 2002.
- Brassier, Ray. *Nihil Unbound*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Butler, Judith. "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy." In *Undoing Gender*, 17–39. New York, NY: Routledge, 2004.
- . *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1993.
- . "Can't Stop Screaming." Public Books, September 5, 2012. <https://www.publicbooks.org/cant-stop-screaming/>.
- . *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005.
- . *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Carson, Anne. *Economy of the Unlost*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- . *Nox*. New York, NY: New Directions, 2010.
- . "'Seated Figure with Red Angle (1988)' by Betty Goodwin." In *Decreation*, 95–101. Toronto, ON: Vintage Canada, 2006.
- . "Variations on the Right to Remain Silent." In *Float*. Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart, 2016.
- . "Wildly Constant." In *Float*. Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart, 2016.
- Cixous, Hélène. "Portraits of Portraits: The Very Day/Light of Roni Horn." In *Poetry in Painting: Writings on Contemporary Arts and Aesthetics*, translated by Eric Prenowitz, 75–78. Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.
- Clark, T.J. *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Colebrook, Claire. "Extinct Theory." In *Death of the PostHuman: Essays on Extinction, Vol. 1*, 29–45. Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2014.
- . "How Queer Can You Go?" In *Sex after Life: Essays on Extinction, Vol. 2*, 179–202. Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2014.
- . "Queer Aesthetics." In *Sex after Life: Essays on Extinction, Vol. 2*, 73–99. Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2014.
- Corcoran, Neil. "A Brother Never Ends." *The Cambridge Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (2012): 371–78.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- . "Freud and the Scene of Writing." In *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass, 196–231. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- . "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve." In *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass, 251–77. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- . *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1994.
- . *The Work of Mourning*. Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- Dickinson, Emily. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Edited by Thomas H. Johnson. Boston, MA: Little Brown and Co., 1955.
- Disney, Dan. "Sublime Disembodiment? Self-as-Other in Anne Carson's *Decreation*." *Orbis Litterarum* 65, no. 1 (2012): 25–38.

- Duras, Marguerite. *Writing*. Translated by Mark Polizzotti. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.
- Enwezor, Okwui. *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*. New York, NY: International Center of Photography, 2008.
- Feldherr, Andrew. "Non Inter Nota Sepulcra: Catullus 101 and Roman Funerary Ritual." *Classical Antiquity* 19, no. 2 (2000): 209–231.
- Fer, Briony. "Complete with Missing Parts." In *Roni Horn Aka Roni Horn*, by Roni Horn, Vol. 1. Gottingen, Germany: Steidl Publishers, 2009.
- . "Storm of the Eye." In *Vatnasafn / Library of Water*, edited by James Lingwood and Gerrie van Noord, 22–31. Gottingen, Germany: Steidl Publishers, 2009.
- Fitzgerald, William. *Catullan Provocations: Lyric Poetry and the Drama of Position*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995.
- Fleming, Joan. "'Talk (Why?) With Mute Ash': Anne Carson's Nox as Therapeutic Biography." *Biography* 39, no. 1 (2016): 64–78.
- Foster, Hal. "An Archival Impulse." *October* 110 (2004): 3–22.
- Foucault, Michel. "Las Meninas." In *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, 3–18. New York, NY: Routledge, 1970.
- . "Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside." In *Foucault/Blanchot*, 9–45. New York, NY: Zone Books, 1987.
- . "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations." In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, edited by Paul Rabinow, 111–19. New York, NY: New Press, 1997.
- . "Preface to The History of Sexuality, Volume Two." In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, edited by Paul Rabinow, 199–205. New York, NY: New Press, 1997.
- . "Sade: Sergeant of Sex." In *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 2*, edited by James E. Faubion, translated by Robert Hurley, 223–27. New York, NY: The New Press, 1998.
- . *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1972.
- . *The History of Sexuality, Vol 1*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York, NY: Random House, 1980.
- . *This Is Not a Pipe*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983.
- . "What Is an Author?" In *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, edited by James D. Faubion, 205–22. Essential Works of Foucault. New York, NY: New Press, 1999.
- François, Anne-Lise. *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008.
- Fried, Michael. *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Genet, Jean, and Charlotte Mandell. "The Studio of Alberto Giacometti." In *Fragments of the Artwork*, 41–68. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Georgis, Dina. "Discarded Histories and Queer Affects in Anne Carson's Autobiography of Red." *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 15, no. 2 (2014): 154–66.
- Godfrey, Mark. "Roni Horn's Icelandic Encyclopedia." In *Photography after Conceptual Art*, edited by Diarmuid Costello and Margaret Iversen, 108–29. Malden, MA: Wiley, 2010.
- . "Roni Horn's Icelandic Encyclopedia." In *Photography After Conceptual Art*, edited by Diarmuid Costello and Margaret Iversen, 109–29. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

- Greenwell, Garth. "How I Fell In Love With the Beautiful Art of Cruising." *Buzzfeed*, April 4, 2016. <https://www.buzzfeed.com/garthgreenwell/how-i-fell-in-love-with-the-beautiful-art-of-cruising>.
- . "On Beauty and Distance." *Fourth Genre: Explorations in Nonfiction* 13, no. 2 (2011): 47–64.
- . *What Belongs to You*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016.
- Hartman, Saidiya V., and Frank B. Wilderson, III. "The Position of the Unthought." *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2 (2003): 183–201.
- Harvey, Elizabeth D., and Mark A. Cheetham. "Tongues of Glaciers: Sedimenting Language in Roni Horn's Vatnasafn/Library of Water and Anne Carson's 'Wildly Constant.'" *Word & Image* 31, no. 1 (2015): 19–27.
- Haver, William. "A Sense of the Common." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 3 (2012): 439–452.
- . "Really Bad Infinities: Queer's Honour and the Pornographic Life." *Parallax* 5, no. 4 (October 1999): 9–21.
- . "The Art of Dirty Old Men: Rembrandt, Giacometti, Genet." *Parallax* 11, no. 2 (April 2005): 25–35.
- . *The Body of This Death: Historicity and Sociality in the Time of AIDS*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996.
- hooks, bell. "Between Us: Traces of Love - Dickinson, Horn, Hooks." In *Earth Grows Thick*, by bell hooks, Felix Gonzales-Torres, Judith Hoos Fox, Amada Cruz, Sarah J. Rogers, Sherri Geldin, and Roni Horn, 57–64. Columbus, OH: Wexner Center for the Arts, 1996.
- Horn, Roni. *Another Water (The River Thames, for Example)*. Gottingen, Germany: Steidl Publishers, 2000.
- . "Among Essential Furnishings." In *Earth Grows Thick*, by bell hooks, Felix Gonzales-Torres, Judith Hoos Fox, Amada Cruz, Sarah J. Rogers, Sherri Geldin, and Roni Horn, 77–83. Columbus, OH: Wexner Center for the Arts, 1996.
- . "The Master Chameleon: Water." *Tate Etc.*, Summer 2007.
- Huffer, Lynne. *Are the Lips a Grave?: A Queer Feminist on the Ethics of Sex*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013.
- . "Strange Eros: Foucault, Ethics, and the Historical a Priori." *Continental Philosophy Review* 49, no. 1 (2016): 103–114.
- Kaufman, Eleanor. *Deleuze, The Dark Precursor*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012.
- Khalip, Jacques. *Last Things: Disastrous Form from Kant to Hajar*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2018.
- Krauss, Rosalind E. "Two Moments from the Post-Medium Condition." *October* 116 (2006): 55–62.
- . *Under Blue Cup*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011.
- Lebovici, Elisabeth. "Faces That Speak Volumes." *Tate Etc.*, Spring 2009.
- Linden, Maya. "'Metaphors of War': Desire, Danger, and Ambivalence in Anne Carson's Poetic Form." *Women's Studies* 43 (2014): 230–45.
- Marcoci, Roxana. *Thomas Demand*. New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 2005.
- Marsden, Jill. "In Search of Lost Sense: The Aesthetics of Opacity in Anne Carson's Nox." *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (2013): 189–198.
- Mars-Jones, Adam. "The Unpronounceable." *London Review of Books*, April 2016.

- Mayer, Sophie. "Picture Theory: On Photographic Intimacy in Nicole Brossard and Anne Carson." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 33, no. 1 (2008): 97–117.
- McCallum, E.L. "Toward a Photography of Love: The Tain of the Photograph in Anne Carson's Autobiography of Red." *Postmodern Culture* 17, no. 3 (2007).
- Morin, Marie-Eve. "How Do We Live Here?: Abyssal Intimacies in Jean-Luc Nancy's *La Vile Au Loin*." *Parrhesia*, no. 25 (2016): 110–28.
- Moten, Fred. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Moten, Fred, and Stefano Harney. "Fantasy in the Hold." In *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. New York, NY: Autonomedia, 2013.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. "An Exempting from Sense." In *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, translated by Bettina Bergo, 121–28. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2009.
- . *Corpus*. Translated by Richard A. Rand. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2008.
- . "The Image - the Distinct." In *The Ground of the Image*, translated by Jeff Fort, 1–14. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005.
- . *The Sense of the World*. Translated by Jeffrey S. Librett. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- . "The Vestige of Art." In *The Muses*, translated by Peggy Kamuf, 81–100. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996.
- Neri, Louise. *Roni Horn*. London, UK: Phaidon Press, 2000.
- O'Rourke, Megan. "The Unfolding." *The New Yorker*, 2010.
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/07/12/the-unfolding>.
- Parr, Jocelyn. "A Signifying Shame: On Narrative, Repetition, and Distance in Anne Carson's *Nox*." *Zeitschrift Für Anglistik Und Amerikanistik* 62, no. 4 (2014): 341–58.
- Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1993.
- Plate, Liedeke. "How to Do Things with Literature in the Digital Age: Anne Carson's *Nox*, Multimodality, and the Ethics of Bookishness." *Contemporary Women's Writing* 9, no. 1 (2015): 93–111.
- Rapatzikou, Tatiani G. "Anne Carson's *Nox*: Materiality and Memory." *Book 2.0* 7, no. 1 (2017): 57–65.
- Ricciardi, Alessia. "Becoming Women: From Antonioni to Anne Carson and Cindy Sherman." *The Yearbook of Comparative Literature* 56 (2010): 6–23.
- Ricco, John Paul. "Pornographic Faith: Two Sources of Naked Sense at the Limits of Belief and Humiliation." In *Porn Archives*, edited by Tim Dean, Steven Rusczycky, and David Squires, 338–55. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.
- . *The Decision Between Us: Art and Ethics in the Time of Scenes*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014.
- . *The Logic of the Lure*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- Schaffner, Ingrid, and Matthias Winzen, eds. *Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing, and Archiving in Art*. Munich, Germany: Prestel-Verlag, 1998.
- Schneider, Rebecca. *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2011.

- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You." In *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, 123–51. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.
- . *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Snyder, Joel. "Picturing Vision." *Critical Inquiry* 6, no. 3 (1980): 499–526.
- Spector, Nancy. "Roni Horn: Picturing Place." In *Events of Relation*, by Laurence Bosse, Marie-Laure Bernadac, and Nancy Spector, 15–51. Paris, France: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1999.
- Spieker, Sven. *The Big Archive*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008.
- Stang, Charles M. "'Nox,' or the Muteness of Things." *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 40, no. 1 & 2 (2012). <https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/articles/winterspring2012/nox-or-muteness-things>.
- Steinhauser, Swen, and Neil Maconald. "Introduction: Performative Afterlife." *Parallax* 24, no. 1 (2018): 1–10.
- Terada, Rei. *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction, Kant to Adorno*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Tschafen, Monique. "Drawing Out a New Image of Thought: Anne Carson's Radical Ekphrasis." *Word & Image* 29, no. 2 (2013): 233–43.
- Weinstein, Jami, and Claire Colebrook. "Postscript on the Posthuman." In *Posthumous Life: Theorizing Beyond the Posthuman*, edited by Jami Weinstein and Claire Colebrook, ix–xxix. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2017.
- Wilkinson, Joshua Marie, ed. *Anne Carson: Ecstatic Lyre*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2015.
- Winterson, Jeanette. "Entering the Flow-World." *Art World Magazine*, March 2009.
- Wonderwater (Alice Offshore)*. 4 vols. Gottingen, Germany: Steidl Publishers, 2004.
- Wurth, Kiene Brillenburg. "Re-Vision as Remediation." *Image & Narrative* 14, no. 4 (2013): 20–33.
- Ziarek, Ewa Plonowska. *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012.

Artist's Books and Artworks Cited

- Celmins, Vija. *Ocean Surface*. 2006. Screenprint on paper, 53 x 67.9 cm.
- Horn, Roni. *Another Water (The River Thames, for Example)*. Gottingen, Germany: Steidl Publishers, 2000.
- . *Becoming a Landscape*. 2001–1999. Twenty chromogenic prints, six prints 52.1 x 52.1 cm each, fourteen prints 77.5 x 58.4 cm each.
- . *Dictionary of Water*. Paris, France: Edition 7L, 2001.
- . *For Two Rooms*. 1986. Two solid copper forms, diameter 29.2–43.2 cm each, length 88.9 cm each.
- . *Index Cixous (Cix Pax)*. Gottingen, Germany: Steidl Publishers, 2005.
- . *Opposite of White, v.1*. 2006. Solid cast glass, height 38.1 cm, diameter 101.6 cm.

- . *Opposite of White*, v.2. 2007. Solid cast glass, height 38.1 cm, diameter 101.6 cm.
- . *Portrait of an Image (with Isabelle Huppert)*. 2005. One hundred chromogenic prints, 31.8 x 38.1 cm.
- . *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn*. Vol. 2. 2 vols. Gottingen, Germany: Steidl Publishers, 2009.
- . *Some Thames*. 2000. 80 inkjet prints on lacquered paper, 70 x 103 cm each (frame included).
- . *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)*. 1999. Fifteen offset lithographs on uncoated paper (photographs and text), 76.2 x 104.1 cm each.
- . *This Is Me, This Is You*. 200 1999. Ninety Six chromogenic prints, 31.8 x 26 cm.
- . *To Place: Arctic Circles*. Denver, CO: Ginny Williams, 1998.
- . *You Are the Weather*. May 1994. Thirty-six gelatin silver prints and sixty-four chromogenic prints, 26.7 x 21.6 cm.
- Hujar, Peter. *Hudson River*. 1975. Gelatin silver print.