

The Ineluctable Modality of the Complex:
Heidegger and the Philosophical Form of *Ulysses*

by

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Thesis

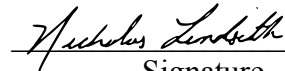
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Introduction

It's a kind of a tour, don't you see, Mr Bloom
said thoughtfully. *Sweeeet song*. There's a
committee formed. Part shares and part profits.
(5.162-63)

As I sat nervously before the start of my 10th-grade Latin final—at my all-boys Jesuit high school, a Clongowes Woods College in the middle of Manhattan—my class's proctor asked us a question: whose picture was hanging to our right? Perhaps years ago I had seen a portrait of Joyce, had archived and unconsciously committed to memory his look: the distinctive eyepatch, the neat mustache and sharp chin goatee, the thin-framed circle glasses. With more conviction than I had any right to, I shouted out, "James Joyce!" He has lived with me ever since.

My engagement was at first small—"Araby" and "Eveline" in 11th-grade English, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* on my own—but at the end of our senior year, two friends and I ambitiously set out to conquer *Ulysses*. I learned then that the text, like all of Joyce's work, was something best shared. My friend Jack and I would take the crosstown bus back to school from our senior year service site, excitedly sharing the connections we stumbled upon, trading and showing them off like they were Pokémon cards and we were back in elementary school. There was an undeniable joy to feeling our way through the text and of making it our own in some way.

Of course, as I think most Joyce readers would admit, there was frustration. Derrida says of Joyce's work that "everything we can say after it looks in advance like a minute self-commentary with which this work accompanies itself" ("Two Words for Joyce" 149). *Ulysses* is the largest imaginable playground for the curious reader, but there is a nagging sense that any fun one has with it has been anticipated. Our joy "is already comprehended by it"—Joyce is our master puppeteer ("Two Words for Joyce" 149). But *Ulysses* benefits from sharing in another

sense. When shared across disciplines, thought traditions, and cultures, “the new marks carry off, enlarge, and project” the work in original ways (“Two Words for Joyce” 149). To share *Ulysses* is to make other connections, interpretations, and readings possible.

This thesis tries to “enlarge” *Ulysses* by thinking through it with Heidegger as a guide. Much like Joyce’s, Heidegger’s writing has moments of frustrating—though also intoxicating—opacity punctuated by bursts of piercing insight. Much like Joyce—who sought a *new* form for the modern novel, a *new* vantage point for Irish self-conception, a *new* possibility for Irish art beyond the shadow of British colonialism and the Catholic church—Heidegger was a philosophical rebel. His project pursued a destruction of Western metaphysics, a different mode of philosophizing, and an original way of thinking about what it means to be human. Although their concerns were heterogenous, their philosophical and artistic paths led them to similar subjects: the role of the artist; the asymptotic nature of totalities; the ontological basis of language, its relationship to historicity, its generative power, its inexhaustibility. Thinkers influenced by Heidegger (most notably Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida) feature prominently in Joyce criticism—this thesis seeks to give Heidegger his due.

Chapter I analyzes “Proteus,” the third episode of *Ulysses*. Here, Joyce uses Stephen Dedalus to investigate the philosophical bases of Aristotelian realism and Berkeleyan idealism. These two traditions have radically different understandings of the human relationship to the external world, and Joyce is most interested in their corollary linguistic implications. If truths about the physical world exist independent of human knowledge, perception or decision—as realism would suggest—the possibilities of language might be constrained. Whereas if physical things were reducible to mental constructions—as Berkeley would offer—this might vest language with immense power. Heidegger’s concept of “world” and its relationship to language

helps clarify both the stakes of Joyce's investigations and his concern with Protean flux that the episode's title foregrounds. Heidegger's writings on history and artistic creation also help make sense of Stephen's poetic experiments in the chapter.

Joyce's recognizes the historicity of any novel artistic creation at the end of "Proteus," and Chapter II analyses this concession in relation to *Ulysses*'s fourteenth episode, "Oxen of the Sun." Joyce imitates dozens of prose styles in this notoriously dense chapter, and Claude Levi-Strauss's concepts of the engineer and bricoleur—imported through Derrida's "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"—shine a light on Joyce's artistic intentions and his relationship to the tradition of English prose. Each of the styles enact what Heidegger would call "world-creation," as the imitations prioritize the inclusion of certain phenomena over others and interpret them in specific ways. Each style, even those that lay claim to a scientific neutrality, is thus deeply ideological. The juxtaposition of the styles highlights their limits, showing that they each describe partial, not totalizing, truths. Heidegger's "On the Essence of Truth" helps crystalize Joyce's arguments and makes clear that both language and style are not perfectible.

The question of truth leads to Chapter III, where a close reading of "Ithaca" draws out Joyce's provocative claims about the totalitarian characteristics of the Catholic church (and its theological truths) and modern science (and its empirical truths). Heidegger's "Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics" helps highlight Joyce's point that both these epistemic systems lay claim to an authority that has no real ontological foundation: they represent, like the styles of "Oxen of the Sun," interpretations of the world that can never secure for themselves an unquestionable footing. Crucially for Joyce, both these epistemic systems involve a knowing

beforehand. They filter in advance *which* phenomena matter, and they predetermine *in what ways* these phenomena can matter at all.

The epilogue considers the importance of these philosophical convictions to the novel's form and to the reader's experience of it. Using the competing understandings of Joseph Frank and Derrida, I argue that *Ulysses* is a *complex* text, as complexity theorists understand the word. Its possible connections, resonances, and meanings are not easily reducible; they are rather an emergent property of the novel's recontextualization within different disciplines, perspectives, and time periods. As with Heidegger's question of Being, *Ulysses* yields no answers. Every reading is generative in much the way Chapter I explores language. Every reading is also inescapably partial, as Chapter II describes style. And, as Chapter III explores science and the Church, every reading cannot escape from approaching the text with a sense of which details—out of the many thousands—matter, and in what specific and limited ways they matter—out of an unbounded infinity of possibilities. Using Louise Amoore's *Cloud Ethics* to build beyond Derrida's concept of "joyceware" and Joseph Frank's "spatial form," this thesis proposes *algorithmic form* as a new way of looking at *Ulysses*'s properties as a text.

Living (in) Language: The (External) World in “Proteus”

Full of merit, yet poetically, the human
Dwells on this earth.

— Friedrich Hölderlin, *In Lovely Blue*

As if all words were not pockets into
which now this and now that has been
put, and now many things at once!

— Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*

To the authorial Joyce, nothing matters more than language. “Proteus” represents a Joycean meditation on its foundations, which requires a detour through the conflicting philosophical positions, and corollary linguistic implications, of realism and idealism. The episode’s titular figure represents one angle of approach. As characterized in *The Odyssey*, Proteus has the power of foresight but only answers to those who can capture and pin him down. He changes shape to avoid being restrained, “[taking] the forms / of all beasts, and water, and blinding fire” (Fitzgerald 71). Although the Homeric parallels in *Ulysses* can be counterproductive hermeneutic devices when assigned too much weight, the story of Proteus helps ground the episode’s themes. “Proteus,” like Proteus, raises questions regarding the relationship between substantiality and Being, the connection between physical reality and human perception, and the source of flux. Joyce—through Stephen’s solipsistic contemplation—deals with these subjects in ways directly relevant to Heidegger’s understanding of Reality, the Real, and how the physical world becomes intelligible and meaningful to us. At first glance esoteric, these debates are of the highest stakes for Joyce’s artistic project. The Joycean and Heideggerian rejection of realism allows them to understand language as something that we live in and that is itself alive.

This chapter begins with a close reading of the episode’s early lines in order to draw out the relevant references that clarify the philosophical and linguistic debate at the heart of

“Proteus.” It then introduces concepts from Heidegger’s work that help make sense of Joyce’s artistic interest in these debates and culminates with an analysis of Stephen’s poetic experimentation in light of these ideas.

* * *

The episode’s early lines are riddled with references that immediately implicate visual perception and its relationship to the real world. Stephen wonders about the “Ineluctable modality of the visible” (3.1),¹ a hard-to-parse phrase that seems to hint at transcendental conditions of sight. “Signatures of all things” (3.2) is often interpreted as a reference to the obscure German mystic Jakob Boehme (1575-1624), whose *Signatura Rerum* (The Signature of All Things) posited a difference between signatures that were accessible to human sight and “true” spiritual identities (Gifford 44). A mention of “colored signs” (3.4) closely follows, which recalls the idealist philosophy of George Berkeley. Central to his thought are the notions that vision is a collection of “colored signs” that we interpret as objects and that the world is ultimately made up only of minds and their ideas. In stark contrast to Berkeley, Stephen thinks of Aristotle—“Limits of the diaphane. But he adds: in bodies” (3.4)—whose philosophy of matter and form states that objects have essences that make them what they are. Historically, this essentialism has been seen to imply some sort of realism, or the idea that the nature and existence of objects are independent of human knowledge, perception, or decision (Tweedale 501).

The text takes a sudden turn as Joyce makes reference to Samuel Johnson. He does so by first detailing Johnson’s famous refutation of Berkeley’s idealism—“How? By knocking his scone against them, sure” (3.5-6). Trying to disprove Berkeley’s assertion that all matter is reducible to mental constructs, Johnson kicked a stone with his foot to demonstrate the

¹ References to *Ulysses* follow the common practice of indicating the episode and line number in the Gabler edition.

irrefutability of physical objects. More importantly, Joyce satirically mocks Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* by coming up with a pseudo-definition for "door": "If you can put your five fingers through it it is a gate, if not a door" (3.8-9).² This may seem unrelated to Stephen's ruminations on visual perception and reality, but it raises important questions about the relationship of language to the real world. Is sight the way we directly apprehend objects in-themselves, to which we then attach definitions that correspond to their essences? This would follow in the tradition of Aristotle and Johnson. Or, is sight a matter of interpretation? The phrases "*thought* through my eyes" and "Signatures...I am here to *read*" (3.1-2, italics added) hint at this. If so, does this mean the idea of objects in-themselves is not the *only* understanding of Being, but one interpretation among many, and does this liberate human language in important ways? This would seem to follow from Berkeley's thought, even if he did not develop the idea explicitly.

Stephen decides to investigate the relationship between perception and reality. Calling on himself to "Shut your eyes and see" (3.9), he walks blindly along Sandymount beach, hearing "his boots crush crackling wrack and shells" (3.10-11). He finds that "You are walking through it howsomever" (3.11)—even without his sight to guide him—ultimately concluding that "I am getting on nicely in the dark" (3.15). This little experiment bolsters an understanding of reality as existing independent of human perception, but Stephen still wonders, "Open your eyes now...Has all vanished since?" (3.25). Seeing the beach still before him, Stephen's thought wanders towards the comforting certitude of the Gloria Patri³: "There all the time without you: and ever shall be, world without end" (3.27-28). An invocation of the Gloria Patri is necessarily

² According to Gifford, Johnson's actual definition offered that "*Door* is used of house, and *gates*, of cities and public buildings except in the license of poetry" (45).

³ In full: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."

wrapped up in Catholic ontology, which has asserted since Aquinas (who appears at line 385) that God is the “prima causa” or unmoved mover—in other words, the cause and creator of all things.⁴ Pondering this mystery makes Stephen think about an equal enigma, that of the creation of life through birth. Birth is a divine “Creation from nothing” (3.35), but Stephen notes that through bellybuttons and umbilical cords, “The cords of all link back, strandentwining cable of all flesh” (3.37). Stephen’s thoughts mime a “creation from nothing” through language: “Aleph, alpha [the first letters of the Hebrew and Greek alphabets]: nought, nought, one” (3.39-40). Juxtaposed with Satan’s temptation of Adam and Eve in Eden—“Will you be as gods” (3.38), creation takes on not only divine overtones but also rebellious, subversive undertones.

In the first forty-or-so lines of the chapter, Joyce introduces a trinity of ideas he is trying to disentangle. Mentions of Aristotle, Johnson, and Berkeley, as well as fragments of Catholic rites that call to mind Catholic ontology, foreground the nature of what is real, its intelligibility to humans, and the ontological basis of both the real and its intelligibility. The question of language is also deeply woven into these themes. Heidegger’s thinking not only clarifies the relationship of these ideas to each other, but provides a useful lens through which to understand Stephen’s experimentation with language later in the chapter and Joyce’s orientation towards it.

* * *

Section 43 of *Being and Time*—*Dasein, Worldhood, and Reality*—is Heidegger’s primary investigation into the nature of Reality and the Real. He first clarifies how Being has been traditionally understood, offering that “entities are first conceived as a context of Things (res) which are present-at-hand. ‘*Being*’ acquires the meaning of ‘*Reality*’. Substantiality becomes the

⁴ In using the concept of “prima causa,” Thomistic theology was building on the intellectual apparatus Aristotle built.

basic characteristic of Being” (*Being and Time* 43:245).⁵ Conceiving of an object as present-at-hand shears it from any relational context, which allows a subject to disinterestedly observe its independent properties, and which ultimately prioritizes substantiality as “the basic characteristic of Being.” The traditional priority of substantiality is reflected in Johnson’s refutation of Berkeley—“How? By knocking his scone against them, sure” (3.5-6)—which took as its basis a presumption that the substantiality of the kicked rock disproved any notion that its existence was ideal and not material.

Heidegger critiques this understanding of Being, since it creates a subject-object divide that demands subjects to either have faith in the external world, or to seek proof of it as Johnson did. Yet, to Heidegger, “attempts [to prove the existence of an external world] which have not mastered their own basis with full transparency, presuppose a subject which is proximally *worldless* or unsure of its world, and which must, at bottom, first assure itself of a world” (*Being and Time* 43:250). This faulty method closely mirrors Stephen’s blind ambling. His worry—“Had all vanished since?” (3.25)—illustrates his self-understanding as a subject whose relationship to the external world is uncertain, and whose supersaturation with Catholic doctrine he does not believe nevertheless provides a necessary “assurance.”

This is a fundamentally misguided approach, since “the basic state of the ‘subject’, Dasein, as Being-in-the-world” means that “the world is disclosed essentially *along with the Being of Dasein*” (*Being and Time* 43:248, 43:247). Heidegger’s assertions here rely on the conceptual apparatus developed in Chapter 3—“The Worldhood of the World”—and, more specifically, Section 18—*Involvement and Significance; the Worldhood of the World*.

⁵ References to *Being and Time* will use the form of “section: page number,” with “page number” referring to the Macquarrie and Robinson translation.

Here, Heidegger illustrates that Dasein, as a being essentially concerned with its Being and its “potentiality-for-being,” must necessarily involve itself in the world in order to fulfill its self-appointed “task of giving a primordial Interpretation for its own Being and for the possibilities of that Being” (*Being and Time* 18:119). In lay terms, as existential beings, humans *have to involve themselves* with things in order to live in accordance with the understanding they have or want to have of themselves. Any involvement acting on this understanding, however, presupposes a network of relationships wherein this involvement and understanding can take place, “*and this ‘wherein’ is the phenomenon of world*” (*Being and Time* 18:119).

Having named the concept of world, Heidegger formalizes its structure, giving the name “significance” to this “relational totality”: “The ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ signifies an ‘in-order-to’; this in turn, a ‘towards-this’; the latter, an ‘in-which’ of letting something be involved; and that in turn, the ‘with-which’ of an involvement” (*Being and Time* 18:120). This terminology can be clarified by using Stephen as the reader encounters him in “Proteus” as an example. He is wearing Buck Mulligan’s boots (a “with-which”), in the context of Sandymount Strand (an “in-which”), so that he can walk on the beach and find solace for his intellectual meditations (a “towards-this”), in the hope finding artistic inspiration (an “in-order-to”), as part of his existential purpose of being an artist (a “for-the-sake-of-which”). This analysis leads to Heidegger’s ultimate conclusion that “Dasein, in so far as it *is* [in an existential sense], has always submitted itself to a ‘world’ which it encounters, and this *submission* belongs essentially to its being” (*Being and Time* 18:120-21).

The relational structure of Dasein’s world and Being provides the basis for Heidegger’s critique of any “question of the ‘Reality’ of the ‘external world,’” since these questions “get raised without any previous clarification of the *phenomenon of world* as such” (*Being and Time*

43:247). When one ignores the phenomenon of world, then “one formulates the question ‘critically,’” and “what ones finds present-at-hand as proximally and solely certain, is something merely ‘inner.’” As with Stephen’s skeptical stroll, “After the primordial phenomenon of Being-in-the-world has been shattered, the isolated subject is all that remains, and this becomes the basis on which it gets joined together with a ‘world’” (*Being and Time* 43:250). Stephen’s attitude thus belies an unstated assumption that the subject can be severed from the relational context of its world, and that the world is actually disclosed for the first time as the subject moves through it. As illustrated in the previous analysis, however, even Stephen’s skepticism, as one strain of his intellectual meditations, is part of a network of relationships that forms his world, which exists prior to his skepticism.

Perhaps more importantly, the grounding of worlds and significance in a structure that has at its base the “for-the-sake-of-which” that Dasein assigns itself indicates that objects are first encountered and gain meaning not in-themselves (as “present-at-hand”), but “as ready-to-hand” (*Being and Time* 18:119)—in short, as part of the relational totality and context determined by Dasein’s world.

Realism, then, is woefully inadequate to Heidegger for two reasons. First, “realism holds that the Reality of the ‘world’ not only needs to be probed but also is capable of proof.” Second, “in realism there is a lack of ontological understanding” as it “tries to explain Reality ontically by Real connections of interaction between things that are Real” (*Being and Time* 43:251). By reducing the world to a collection of objects that are substantial and present-at-hand, realism ignores the referential structure within which things can be said to exist (not physically, but meaningfully) in the first place. This explains Heidegger’s partial sympathy with idealism, since “If idealism emphasizes that Being and Reality are only ‘in the consciousness’, this expresses an

understanding that Being cannot be explained through entities” (*Being and Time* 43:251). Tying these two strands together, Heidegger stakes out a middle ground between realism and idealism, which hinges on a distinction between Reality and the Real that neither idealism nor realism are capable of making. Despite “the fact that reality is ontologically grounded in the Being of Dasein,” this “does not signify that only when Dasein exists and as long as Dasein exists, can the Real be as that which in itself it is.” But, “only as long as Dasein is (that is, only as long as an understanding of Being is ontically possible), ‘is there’ Being. When Dasein does not exist, ‘independence’ ‘is’ not either, nor ‘is’ the ‘in-itself.’” This ultimately means that “Reality (not the real) is dependent upon care” (*Being and Time* 43:255), which takes it direction from the content of Dasein’s world.

Returning to the dispute between Johnson and Berkeley can help clarify Heidegger’s careful parsing. In line with the idea that the Real can “be as that which in itself it is” independent of Dasein’s existence, the rock that Johnson kicks will exist as part of the Real regardless of his perceptions of it. Nevertheless, the rock emerges out from an undifferentiated Real as a “rock” only because Dasein exists and it has a concept of “rock” that allows it to identify the kicked object as a “rock.” In this sense, “Reality...is dependent on care.”

In line with Heidegger’s thinking, Stephen plays with Berkeley’s idealism in ways that illustrate the jump that occurs between the Real and Reality. Trying to make sense of vision, Stephen thinks of “The good bishop of Cloyne”—Berkeley’s ecclesiastical title—who thought of sight as a “veil of space with colored emblems hatched on its field” (3.416-17). Within the field of heraldry, a broad term encompassing matters related to coats of arms, hatching refers to the practice by which colors are indirectly represented by lines and dots. This analogy to hatching makes clear that our vision is an act of “thought” or “reading,” where objects are not

apprehended in-themselves, but become intelligible as a play of difference. Stephen approaches this realization in the next sequence: “Hold hard. Coloured on a flat: yes, that’s right. Flat I see, then think distance, near, far, flat I see, east, back. Ah, see now! Falls back suddenly, frozen in stereoscope” (3.418-20).

* * *

With the distinction between the Real and Reality made plain, Stephen’s recitation of Catholic ontological thought now becomes clear for what it is: a fundamental ontology of the Real (as substantiality) but not Reality (as care and understanding). Heidegger, almost as a footnote, offers that “in significance itself...there lurks the ontological condition which makes it possible for Dasein, as something which understands and interprets, to disclose such things as ‘significations’; upon these, in turn, is founded the Being of words and of language” (*Being and Time* 18:121). In this statement lies the crux of Joyce’s authorial interest in what seems to be an esoteric philosophical debate, since embedded in this debate is a clash between two radically different understandings of language. One neuters his creative capacity, the other empowers it.

In realism, where Reality is narrowly understood as the Real, language’s role is one of correspondence: it names and exhaustively defines—according to their natures—the objects in-themselves that compose the world. An understanding of language such as this creates what Berkeley, quoted by Sheldon Brivic, called “the curtain of words,” a phenomenon where

No sooner do we hear the words of a familiar language pronounced in our ears but the ideas corresponding thereto present themselves to our minds; in the very same instant the sound and the meaning enter the understanding; so closely are they united that it is not in our power to keep out the one except we exclude the other also. (Brivic 83)

This fundamentally tethers language to an object, whether abstract or physical, limiting the possibilities of artistic creation through defamiliarization and limiting our possible understandings of the world. Alexander Fraser, whose study of Berkeley was found in Joyce's library, used the phrase "the mist and veil of words" (Brivic 82); this historical evidence ladens Stephen's thoughts that immediately succeed his Berkeleyan episode—"Now where the blue hell am I bringing her beyond the veil?" (3.424-25)—with added meaning: a move beyond the veil is a move towards a novel understanding of language, one whose basis is not correspondence but care.

Central to Heidegger's understanding of language is the idea that it cannot be reduced to communicative description or assertion. He offers that "In the current view, language is held to be a kind of communication...But language is not only and primarily an audible and written expression of what is to be communicated. It not only puts forth in words and statements what is overtly or covertly indented to be communicated; language alone brings beings as beings into the open for the first time" ("The Origin of the Work of Art" 198). The intimate relationship between language and Being means that "Where there is no language, as in the Being of stone, plant, or animal, there is also no openness of beings, and consequently no openness of nonbeing and of the empty" ("The Origin of the Work of Art" 198).

In its unique capacity to "bring beings as beings into the open for the first time," language serves the function of "naming." But, as Heidegger notes, "This naming does not consist in something previously known being merely furnished with a name" ("Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry" 121). It rather "brings the unsayable as such into a world" ("The Origin of the Work of Art" 199). Heidegger thinks this "naming" to be an essentially poetical act, but "Poetry is thought of here in so broad a sense and at the same time in such intimate essential unity with

language and word, that we must leave open whether art in all its modes, from architecture to poesy, exhausts the essence of poetry” (“The Origin of the Work of Art” 199). Heidegger posits poetical language as a “founding of truth”—which “thrusts up the awesome and at the same time thrusts down the ordinary” —and as “an overflow, a bestowal” (“The Origin of the Work of Art” 200).

The contours of Heidegger’s conception of poetical language at this point come into view: as an “overflow,” poetical language breaks open the circular currents of “ordinary” meaning and use, creating and naming something “awesome” that was previously “unsayable.” Richard Rorty draws out the implications of such an orientation towards language: contra the realist understanding of perception and inference as the exhaustive sources of knowledge, assigning priority to poetical language “is to think of language, logical space, and the realm of possibility, as open-ended” (“Philosophy as science, as metaphor, and as politics” 12). This empowers the authorial Joyce to expand “the realm of possibility” by defamiliarizing existing linguistic resources and fashioning new ones, and he stages a few of Stephen’s sophomoric attempts at artistic creation: “His lips lipped and mouthed fleshless lips of air: mouth to her moomb. Oomb, allwombing tomb. His mouth moulded issuing breath, unspeached: ooeeehah: roar of cataractic planets, globed, blazing, roaring wayawayawayawayaway” (3.401-04). This is language without an object, groping after something “unsayable” to bring into being. Its resonances are unclear—does “moomb” draw from “moon,” “womb,” “tomb”, or “mom”?—and the clash between the life-giving and sepulchral does not crystalize into a meaning capable of being communicated propositionally.

The importance of these artistic attempts is paramount to Heidegger, since otherwise we risk “floundering in a commonness that we have placed under the protection of so-called common sense.” He worries that

The common speech becomes the current speech. We meet it on all sides, and since it is common to all, we now accept it as the only standard. Anything that departs from this commonness...is at once considered a violation of the standard. It is branded as a frivolous whim. All this is in fact quite in order, as soon as we regard the common as the only legitimate standard, and become generally incapable of fathoming the commonness of the common...This floundering in commonness is part of the high and dangerous game and gamble in which, by the essence of language, we are the stakes. (“What Calls for Thinking” 389)

Since “Only where there is language is there world” (“Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry” 121), we are in constant need of new poetical language that reconceptualizes our world and “thrusts up the awesome and at the same time thrusts down the ordinary.”

In subscribing to a view of language that imbues it with as much power to change Reality as any material action, Joyce returns to the idea of Protean flux at the heart of the chapter. Whereas in the Homeric tale, flux is purely substantial, Joyce locates the source of flux in language, in the moves outside of “commonness” that challenge naturalized understandings of the world. The most striking instance comes as Stephen observes a dog on the beach. As it runs, it looks “like a bounding hare,” but subsequently takes on the likeness of a horse as it “trotted on twinkling shanks,” then “halted with stiff forehoofs” (3.334, 3.336, 3.338). Running back to its owners, the dog “reared up at them with mute bearish fawning,” with “a rag of wolf’s tongue redpanting” from its jaws (3.345-46). It once again “loped off at a calf’s gallop,” encountering a

dog carcass that causes it to sniff “rapidly like a dog” (3.349). Although the substance of the dog remains the same throughout the passage, the metaphorical descriptions place it in new contexts and cause it to change shape.⁶ Stephen continues this exercise with a radically defamiliarizing description of his urination:

Better get this job over quick. Listen: a fourworded wavespeech: seesoo, hrss, rsseeiss, ooos. Vehement breath of waters amid seasnakes, rearing horses, rocks. In cups of rocks it slops: flop, slop, slap: bounded in barrels. And, spent, its speech ceases. It flows purling, widely flowing, floating foampool, flower unfurling. (3.456-60)

He once again uses language that does not correspond to anything actual, creating instead a world of images and metaphors.

Both Heidegger and Joyce are attuned, however, to the fact that language can never be totally originary. Any novel linguistic usage in some sense profits off the language games played before it; it is historical. Heidegger offers in “The Origin of the Work of Art” that “Modern subjectivism, to be sure, immediately misinterprets creation, taking it as the sovereign subject’s performance of genius...Poetic projection comes from nothing [in] that it never takes its gift from the ordinary and traditional. Yet it never comes from nothing in that what is projected by it is only the withheld determination of historical Dasein itself” (200). Heidegger’s last phrase points toward his understanding—developed in Division 2, Chapter 5 of *Being and Time*—of history not as a collection of past events, which collectively are “the possibility which has been

⁶ Stephen’s description of the dog using the language of heraldry—“On a field tenney a buck, tripping, proper, unattired” (3.336-7)—is also noteworthy. Gifford offers the following clarifying entry for this line: “Stephen translates the dog on the beach into the language of heraldry: *tenney*: tenne, orange, or tawny; *trippant*: applied to a buck or stag when *passant*, or walking; *proper*: in natural colors; *unattired*: without antlers (unusual in heraldry because it would imply impotence)...” (60).

factically existent” (*Being and Time* 76:447), but as an interpretation of those events that through repetition structures the possibilities of the future. Only in language is this understanding possible, since “Only where world holds sway is there history,” and “Only where there is language is there world.” Language thus “holds good for the fact—i.e., it guarantees—that humans can be historical” (“Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry” 121). Yet art, as a rupture in the “ordinary,” creates the possibility for new futures: “Whenever art happens—that is, whenever there is a new beginning—a thrust enters history; history either begins or starts over again” (“The Origin of the Work of Art” 201).

Stephen acknowledges the tension between novelty and inheritance. Satisfied with his poetic musings, he thinks of the divine creation found in Genesis: “*Et vidit Deus. Et erant valde bona*” (3.439-40). The chapter closes, however, with a recognition of what came before and, in coming before, shaped his efforts: “Dead breaths I living breathe, tread dead dust, devour a urinous offal from all dead” (3.479-80).

History, for Joyce, is a nightmare from which he cannot awake, though it is something he can make anew.

Kaleidesco-prose: Styles and “Worlds” in “Oxen of the Sun”

Don't talk to me about politics.
I'm only interested in style.
— James Joyce

We need to interpret interpretations
more than to interpret things.
— Michel de Montaigne

“Oxen of the Sun” is an aesthetic demonstration of Joyce’s recognition that all language and are art historical. Containing imitations of figures ranging from Ælfric to Dickens, the episode mimetically marches through the “urinous offal” of English prose. Joyce, by ordering the styles chronologically and setting them alongside Mina Purefoy’s arduous labor at the National Maternity Hospital, invites the reader to view the historical progression of prose styles against the backdrop of the gestational parallel. This rehearsal of English prose history not only allows Joyce to acknowledge his linguistic inheritance (even as he asserts mastery over it), but also builds on the philosophical arguments raised by “Proteus.” In sorting, interpreting and relating phenomena, the styles each demonstrate the world-disclosing power of language that fascinates Joyce. The variation in the disclosures precipitated by each style, however, emphasizes that every disclosure is partial and at the same time obscures other possible disclosures. If things are inexhaustible—since no account of them can be totalizing and final—and style is inescapably partial, then language is not capable of the perfectibility that realism might hope for.

The chapter begins by conceptualizing “Oxen of the Sun” as a Joycean engagement with the concept of historicity, and uses Derrida and T.S. Eliot to clarify crucial aspects of this engagement. It then examines two of the episode’s styles, those belonging to Thomas Huxley and *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, as examples of Heidegger’s world-disclosure at work. The chapter concludes by relating its reading of “Oxen of the Sun” to Joyce’s gestational

parallel, and uses Heidegger's "On the Essence of Truth," to argue that any disclosure is at the same time a concealment.

* * *

In his study of "Oxen of the Sun," Wolfgang Iser offers a theory about the utility of the Homeric parallels in *Ulysses*, saying that "...the Homeric parallel takes on a very precise function. If the novel is to uncover a new dimension of human existence, this can only present itself to the conscious mind of the reader against a background made recognizable by allusions and references which will thus provide a sufficient amount of familiarity" ("Doing Things in Style" 182). Although Iser is right in this claim, Joyce's interest in the literary tradition—especially in this chapter—is much more selfish. "Oxen," as a famously dense and difficult episode, does not make it easier on the reader by flooding itself with English prose styles. Instead, "Oxen" provides Joyce an opportunity to both acknowledge his predecessors—those who shaped the novel as an art form and the English language as a code of semiotic exchange—while at the same time using his imitations to highlight the problem of style. Joyce's historical smorgasbord calls to mind his modernist contemporary, T.S. Eliot, who thought that "...the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" ("Tradition and the Individual Talent" 85). "Oxen," then, is a meditation on the "presence" of the past; only by rehearsing its history does its relationship to the present become clearer.

Jacques Derrida's discussion of Claude Lévi-Strauss—specifically his concepts of the *bricoleur* and the engineer—helps explain the relevance of this point to Joyce's self-conception as an artist. Recreating Lévi-Strauss's conceptual schema, Derrida says that the *bricoleur*

is someone who uses 'the means at hand,' that is, the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially

conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous—and so forth. (“Structure, Sign, and Play” 285)

As for the engineer, he

should be the one to construct the totality of his language, syntax, and lexicon. In this sense, the engineer is a myth. A subject who supposedly would be the absolute origin of his own discourse and supposedly would construct it ‘out of nothing,’ ‘out of whole cloth,’ would be the creator of the verb, the verb itself. The notion of the engineer who supposedly breaks with all forms of bricolage is therefore a theological idea...As soon as we cease to believe in such an engineer and in a discourse which breaks with the received historical discourse, and as soon as we admit that every finite discourse is bound by a certain bricolage and that the engineer and the scientist are also species of bricoleurs, then the very idea of bricolage is menaced and the difference in which it took on its meaning breaks down. (“Structure, Sign, and Play” 285)

“Oxen” ought to be read as a Joycean realization of the impossibility of engineering and the inescapability of bricolage. Abandoning the idea of a “discourse which breaks with the received historical discourse” means acknowledging that history—and, more specifically to “Oxen,” the history of the English language—is a nightmare from which Joyce cannot awake, an acknowledgement which Joyce enacts by recreating and mimicking that exact history. This recognition, however, is not a renunciation of the possibility of novelty. Embracing the role of *bricoleur* merely means realizing that in order to say something previously “unsayable,” the

“means at hand”—including the “common” and the “ordinary”—are worthy, even necessary, tools. Read in this way, “Oxen” seems to typify Joyce’s method throughout *Ulysses*. He irreverently uses any cultural material he finds suitable to stage his novel, especially those materials “which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used” by Joyce. “Nausicaa,” for instance, somehow finds within the saccharine, English, and imperial women’s magazines of the era a hint of modern consciousness that allows Gerty MacDowell to articulate inchoate frustrations with the injustices that surround her (Gibson 142). “Oxen,” moreover, employs dozens of prose styles, extracting them from their original contexts and using them in ways for which they “had not been especially conceived.”

* * *

The episode’s noteworthiness is not exhausted by its meta-commentary on Joyce’s project. Perhaps more importantly, Joyce’s stylistic collage foregrounds the way in which language and style disclose a world. Themes of love and fertility recur throughout the chapter, and the recurrence of these themes as they are viewed through different perspectives highlights the inherently ideological nature of style. Iser notes that “All these overblown treatments of the subject show an extremely one-sided view, for each style reveals a latent ideology, constantly reducing the reality to the scope of individual principle” (“Doing Things in Style” 190). Developing this thought further, Iser says that “The styles imitated by Joyce are dominated by such thoughts or thought systems” (“Doing Things in Style” 191), which act to curate the phenomena chosen for description and quietly exclude those that are not. “The judgements inherent in each style,” then, become for Joyce, “the whole problem of style” (“Doing Things in Style” 191). Iser’s claims can be elucidated first by exploring Heidegger’s understanding of how art discloses a world, and then applying their thoughts to two of the styles present in the text.

In “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger forthrightly states, “To be a work means to set up a world” (170). My analysis of “Proteus” developed Heidegger’s notion of a world as a “relational totality,” and he uses the example of a Greek temple to demonstrate world-disclosure at work:

It is the temple-work that first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being. The all-governing expanse of this open relational context is the world of this historical people. (“The Origin of the Work of Art” 167)

The temple, as a temple, erects a world within which certain gods are worshipped, specific ideals are valued, and social relations are given a particular shape. The same is true of language and “the linguistic work”:

In the tragedy nothing is staged or displayed theatrically, but the battle of the new gods against the old is being fought. The linguistic work, originating in the speech of the people, does not refer to this battle; it transforms the people’s saying so that now every living word fights the battle and puts up for decision what is holy and what unholy, what great and what small, what brave and what cowardly, what lofty and what flighty, what master and what slave. (“The Origin of the Work of Art” 168-69)

Joyce’s imitation of the 19th-century naturalist and comparative anatomist Thomas Henry Huxley illustrates how style “puts up for decision what is holy and unholy, what great and what small.” For the passage spanning from line 1223 to 1309, everything is interpreted with respect to Huxley’s scientific paradigm. Stephen’s “perverted transcendentalism” is said to run “directly

counter to accepted scientific methods” (14.1223-24). A debate about the “determination of sex” in an embryo causes the narrator to weigh the prevailing theories: “the view of Empedocles of Trinacria” says that “the right ovary” is responsible, whereas others claim “the too long neglected spermatozoa or nemasperms” (14.1231-34). Questions of birth and death lose their symbolic content and character—everything now is a question of scientific cause and effect. This is best demonstrated by the narrator’s reaction to Bloom’s pithy remark that “we are all born in the same way but we all die in different ways” (14.1241-42). Whereas in another context one might interpret this metaphorically, within the world of Huxley’s style, this witticism provides an opportunity to enumerate the many factors that contribute to death in Dublin:

Mr M. Mulligan (Hyg. Et Eug. Doc.)⁷ blames the sanitary conditions in which our greylunged citizens contract adenoids, pulmonary complaints etc. by inhaling the bacteria which lurk in dust. These factors, he alleged, and the revolting spectacles offered by our streets, hideous publicity posters, religious ministers of all denominations, mutilated soldiers and sailors, exposed scorbutic cabdrivers, the suspended carcasses of dead animals, paranoic bachelors and unfructified duennas — these, he said, were accountable for any and every fallingoff in the calibre of the race. (14.1242-50)

Each of these causes, when viewed in this system of classification, is removed from any social or political context that might produce it. What matters is its biological relationship to death.

Huxley’s style also asserts an ideological position: the infinite capacity of scientific inquiry to produce further knowledge. Confronted with the “plain straightforward question [of]

⁷ Gifford (437) notes that this is an abbreviated form of “Doctor of Hygienics and Eugenics,” highlighting that even the episode’s characters are subject to scientific taxonomy. Elsewhere, Bloom is identified parenthetically as “Pubb. Cav.”—short for “public canvasser.” The style is so oppressive and as to even impose this same treatment on language, questioning whether a “remark” made by Stephen would be better classified as an “interruption.”

why a child of normally healthy parents and seemingly a healthy child and properly looked after succumbs unaccountably in early childhood,” the narrator offers that this question must, “in the poet’s words, give us pause” (14.1273-77). Ever careful of straying into metaphorical language, the narrator carefully notes that “give us pause” are “the poet’s words.”⁸ More importantly, however, the narrator’s subsequent answer rejects the idea that this phenomenon is “unaccountable.” In fact,

Nature, we may rest assured, has her own good and cogent reasons for whatever she does and in all probability such deaths are due to some law of anticipation by which organisms in which morbid germs have taken up their residence (modern science has conclusively shown that only the plasmic substance can be said to be immortal) tend to disappear at an increasingly earlier stage of development, an arrangement which, though productive of pain to some of our feelings (notably the maternal), is nevertheless, some of us think, in the long run beneficial to the race in general in securing thereby the survival of the fittest. (14.1277-85)

Mention of nature’s “good and cogent reasons,” as well as its “law,” belie what Rorty, borrowing from Hilary Putnam, called “the God’s-eye view”: a belief in the possibility of “a formal ahistorical scheme” which “attempts to have a pigeonhole ready for every actual event which might occur” (“Philosophy as science, as metaphor, and as politics” 11). In “the God’s-eye view,” nothing would happen “unaccountably,” although our tools and methods of inquiry might in a certain historical moment not be capable of producing an accurate account with explanatory power. Huxley’s style nevertheless asserts the authority of knowledge produced by scientific

⁸ On line 1305, Bloom’s phrase “let the cat into the bag” is referred to as an “esthete’s allusion,” whose meaning can only be approached “presumably.”

inquiry as it mentions how “conclusively” it has demonstrated the immortality of the “plasmic substance.” Perhaps most worryingly, the style is dismissive of the realm of human emotions and concerns. It unsympathetically glosses over the grief felt by a mother after the loss of an infant, instead trumpeting these tragic deaths as instances where “the survival of the fittest” might be “in the long run beneficial to the race.”

In fewer than a hundred lines, Joyce uses Huxley’s style to disclose a world, one where all things are understood with respect to their scientific properties, where taxonomical obsession tries to systematize all things, where scientific understanding reigns over and above any humanism, and where metaphor is seen as a frivolous distraction from things-as-they-actually-are.

A more humorous example of world-disclosure comes from lines 123-166, where Joyce imitates the style of *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, written in the 14th century. This world transforms Bloom into “traveller Leopold” and the National Maternity Hospital into a foreign “castle” (14.126, 14.123). The sense of intrigue pervading the travel stories turns a quotidian bee-sting suffered by Bloom into an exaggerated encounter where he “was wounded in his breast by a spear wherewith a horrible dragon was smitten him” (14.129-30). The narrator is especially attuned to any foreign objects, noticing “a board that was of the birchwood of Finlandy,” as well as “vessels that are wrought by the magic of Mahound” (14.141-42, 14.146-47). The reference to the “magic of Mahound”—“Mahound” being an archaic name for the prophet Muhammad (Gifford 411)—also points toward the dominance of Christianity in Medieval Europe and the sense of otherness with which Islam was regarded.

This passage is most noteworthy, however, due to the narrator’s encounter with a can of sardines, which captures the relationship between language and world explored in my analysis of

“Proteus.” Lacking the vocabulary that we now have to name and describe sardine cans, the narrator ends up floundering, saying only that

there was a vat of silver that was moved by craft to open in the which lay strange fishes
withouten heads though misbelieving men nie that this be possible thing without they see
it natheless they are so. And these fishes lie in an oily water brought there from Portugal
land because of the fatness that therein is like to the juices of the olivepress. (14.149-54)

As a style from the 14th century, it can only admit this 20th-century object into its world using its 14th-century language. In this way, language might be said to constitute the bounds of its world, since “World is the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into Being” and in the language that constructs a world “all things gain their lingering and hastening, their remoteness and nearness, their scope and limits” (“The Origin of the Work of Art” 170). This clarifies how language, especially in this case, is not merely or even primarily representational. Rather, the style actively generates *what* the object is and *how* it is received. For Joyce and Heidegger, there might be a physical world beyond language, but there is no meaning outside of it.

* * *

By placing these styles—and the worlds they disclose—in juxtaposition, Joyce allows their descriptions of the same things to reverberate off each other, revealing their partiality. Echoing Iser, these descriptions contain a “one-sided view”: to the traveler, the National Maternity Hospital is a castle, home to numerous exotic objects; to the scientist, it is a temple of inquiry suitable for asking and answering scientific questions. The “one-sided”-ness of the descriptions only emerges, however, from seeing them next to each other. When one is “in” a style, its ideological content dissolves and becomes invisible, precisely because its ideology

performs the quiet function of determining “which individual phenomena out of all those present are, or are not to be presented” (“Doing Things in Style” 191). The same is true of the episodes of *Ulysses*. To return to the example of “Nausicaa,” the limits of Gerty’s women’s-magazine-world disappear as we occupy her mind, but they come into sharp focus when “Nausicaa” is read against the high-minded philosophical backdrop of Stephen’s world in “Scylla and Charybdis.”

Calling attention to the problem of ideology in style raises the question of authority. If the various styles cause the objects in “Oxen” to “become something living and moving,” and the “multiplication of perspectives will blur the outline” of the objects (“Doing Things in Style” 186), is there a description of the objects that is most proper or correct? Joyce’s answer is a resounding “no”; “Oxen” as an exercise in style reveals “the characteristic quality of style—namely, that it imposes form on an essentially formless reality” (“Doing Things in Style” 193). The difference between Reality and the Real emerges once more.

This understanding of the text bears directly on the gestational parallel that some scholars, most notably Stuart Gilbert, read “Oxen” in relation to (Gilbert 298). The backdrop of Mina Purefoy’s labor and the chronological procession of styles in some sense mirrors the development of a fetus, and the text is divided into nine parts that map onto the nine months of pregnancy (Blamires 146). An analogy such as this would seem to imply that language and style are in some sense perfectible, and that a chronological assortment of styles is an accurate representation of their linear progress through time towards perfectibility. As with the Homeric correspondences, however, the links between this analogy and Joyce’s thoughts on style “never meet” (Levin 71), and the relevance of the parallel is in its dissonances as well as its resonances. Although Joyce arranges the styles chronologically, his emphasis on the ideology of style highlights the disjunctions, as opposed to the continuities, between the worlds disclosed by

language. And since imposing “form on an essentially formless reality” is the “characteristic quality of style,” Joyce only constructs a notion of perfectible language so that he can subvert it.

Two important resonances, however, might salvage the fetal analogy. The chapter opens with a thrice-repeated incantation—“Deshil Holles Eamus,” a use of language that seems notably open and poetic. Perhaps it is a moment of conception that mirrors Heidegger’s understanding of language—explicated in my chapter on “Proteus”—as a “bestowal” or “founding.” The chapter also ends with long passages of slang, which, coming after Mina Purefoy has finally delivered her child, can be seen as a sort of “afterbirth.” Occupying the realm of actual life and social use, slang is not mummified as with the prose styles Joyce mimes. It is instead capable of constant reinvention, allowing it to change shape along with the world it occupies.

Joyce’s aesthetic experiments are illuminated by another element of Heidegger’s thought. Detailing how every disclosure or interpretation involves at the same time a concealment, Heidegger writes, “Precisely because letting be always lets beings be in a particular comportment that relates to them and thus discloses them, it conceals beings as a whole. Letting-be is intrinsically at the same time a concealing. In the ek-sistent freedom of Da-sein a concealing of being as a whole propriates. Here there *is* concealment” (“On the Essence of Truth” 129-30). Put into plainer language, Rorty offers that “you cannot let all possible beings be at once. That is, you cannot let all possible languages be spoken at once. The quarks and the Olympians, for example, would get in each other’s way. The result would be chaos” (“Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism” 46). Style, for Joyce, is the “comportment” that “relates to” and “discloses” objects in a certain manner. But in line with Rorty, this manner cannot possibly be total, and always at the same time involves a rejection or exclusion of other interpretations. Rorty mentions

conflict between the “quarks and Olympians,” and for “Oxen” this same conflict applies to the styles of Huxley and the *Travel Stories of Sir John Mandeville*.

Somewhat aphoristically, Heidegger says that “*As ek-sistent, Dasein is insistent*” (“On the Essence of Truth” 132). That is, as a being that necessarily interprets, Dasein necessarily insists on an interpretation. The same is true of style. Heidegger worries, however, that in insisting on an interpretation, “which discloses and at the same time conceals, it happens that concealing appears as what is first of all concealed” (“On the Essence of Truth” 130). Style loses sight of itself as style when it does not acknowledge the partial nature of the world it can disclose. Heidegger raises another worry when he questions our ability to recognize this partiality:

...to reside in what is readily available is intrinsically not to let the concealing of what is concealed hold sway. Certainly, among readily familiar things there are also some that are puzzling, unexplained, undecided, questionable. But these self-certain questions are merely transitional, intermediate points in our movement within the readily familiar and thus not essential. Wherever the concealment of beings as a whole is conceded only as a limit that occasionally announces itself, concealing as a fundamental occurrence has sunk into forgottenness. (“On the Essence of Truth” 131-32)

The most dangerous style or ideology, then, is that which has no sense of concealment as an intimate and essential part of any of its disclosures.

In a dialectical manner typical of Joyce, the episode’s chronological assortment not only raises the “problem of style” mentioned by Iser, but also attempts to free Joyce from it. For if the episode is composed in styles not belonging to Joyce, what exactly is his? His totalizing and

mimetic summary of English prose attempts to stand *outside* of style, but its faux-authority is something that the text at the same time deconstructs.

Always Already: Anticipatory Interpretations in “Ithaca”

Only mathematics and mathematical logic
can say as little as the physicist means to say.
— Bertrand Russell, *The Scientific Outlook*

Ask no questions and you’ll hear no lies.
(11.335)

“Ithaca” is the final link in a philosophical chain that begins with “Proteus,” continues on through “Oxen of the Sun,” and culminates with *Ulysses*’s penultimate chapter. Two parallel tracks of thought wind their way through these episodes.

In “Proteus,” which explores the relationship between the human mind and the external world, they are represented by Aristotelian realism and Berkeleyan idealism. The former posited the existence of objects-in-themselves, defined by their essences and physical matter. The latter took the opposite tack, claiming that physical objects are reducible to mental ideas, advancing the idea that sight is an act of interpretation and that direct apprehension of objects-in-themselves is an impossible fantasy. Heidegger’s intervention was a useful one, clarifying how humans are always already in a “world,” constructed out of the language and relationships that allow them to make and discover meaning, which makes a Reality out of the Real. Joyce’s play with Johnson’s proscriptive understanding of language and Stephen’s poetic experimentation hint at the artistic implications of Heidegger’s approach.

“Oxen of the Sun” more directly tackles these questions of language. Once again, two parallel tracks emerge, which pick up where those from “Proteus” left off. The gestational parallel—which implies that language develops in a linear and teleological manner—finds its grounding in the ideas of Aristotle and Johnson. If our world is composed of objects-in-themselves, our language ought to correspond to their essences, and this provides us with a task we can come ever closer to achieving. Perfectibility is possible. The other track emerges by

examining how the different styles Joyce imitates disclose different “worlds,” imposing different partial Realities on top of an inexhaustible Real. The impossibility of a totalizing Reality, which describes and includes every possible understanding of the Real, brings the inescapability of concealment to the fore. In every interpretation, something is by necessity omitted and excluded.

The epistemological implications of each track are profound, and Joyce gives them an audience in “Ithaca.” He plays with the idea of science as a *scientia universalis* and Catholicism as a *theologia universalis*—foundations from which all knowledge, description, and understanding emerge—through the episode’s catechetical form and method. These competing universal foundations both provide the assurance that a single truth about all objects and phenomena can be achieved. Here this track finally ends at the station. But a rejection of these foundations on the basis that within them “concealing as a fundamental occurrence has sunk into forgottenness” necessitates a notion that there is no such thing as unqualified knowledge. It calls for an embrace of pluralism and an assertion that truth’s siren song is essentially polyphonic, seducing different ears with different voices. This track continues on, knowing, as Rorty notes, that “there will never be a final resting-place for thought” (“Philosophy as science, as metaphor, and as politics” 19).

* * *

An analysis of “Ithaca” and its commentary on science and the Church would benefit from an understanding of Heidegger’s concept of the mathematical, which he develops in “Modern Science, Metaphysics and Mathematics.” Heidegger begins the essay with a claim that “a fact is what it is in the light of the fundamental conception” (272). This hints at the idea that facts are grounded in ideological assumptions about what can be said to be a fact in the first place; there is no such thing as a fact-in-itself, independent of a mode that reveals and determines

it. Heidegger's central idea in this essay is that our current idea of a fact is grounded in something called the "mathematical." He traces the mathematical back to Newton's First Law of Motion,⁹ which inaugurated a radical transformation in the scientific understanding of nature (writ large). Newton's discovery rendered obsolete the Aristotelian notion that "the kind of motion and place of the body are determined according to the nature [read: essence] of the body" (284). Instead, the positing of universal laws which regulate all bodies means that "All bodies are alike. No motion is special. Every place is like every other, each moment like any other...All determinations of bodies have one basic blueprint" (291). Because of this, Heidegger thinks,

the concept of nature in general changes. Nature is no longer the *inner* principle [read: essence] out of which the motion of the body follows; rather nature is the mode of the variety of the changing relative positions of bodies, the manner in which they are present in space and time, which themselves are domains of possible positional orders and determinations of order and have no special traits anywhere. (288)

This new paradigm follows from Newton's law, which "speaks of...a body which is left to itself." But, Heidegger wonders, "Where do we find it? There is no such body. There is also no experiment that could ever bring such a body to direct perception...This law speaks of a thing that does not exist" (288-89). In taking something unreal as its base, the mathematical paradigm is best characterized as a theoretical blueprint which "first opens a domain where things—i.e. facts—show themselves" (291). It is shaped by a set of "anticipating determinations and assertions," and extending these "determinations and assertions" creates a "projection [in which

⁹ Often worded as, "Every object persists in its state of rest or uniform motion in a straight line unless it is compelled to change that state by forces impressed on it."

it] is posited that which things are taken as, what and how they are to be evaluated beforehand” (291). It is within this projection and domain that

Natural bodies are now only what they *show* themselves as... Things now show themselves only in the relation of places and time points and in the measures of mass and working forces. How they show themselves is prefigured in the project. Therefore, the project also determines the mode of taking in and studying what shows itself, experience... (292)

This prefiguration of experience, which “establishes a uniformity of all bodies according to relations of space, time, and motion,” both “makes possible and requires a universal uniform measure as an essential determinant of things, i.e., numerical measurement” (292-93). It is in this way, Heidegger believes, that

The founding of analytical geometry by Descartes, the founding of the infinitesimal calculus by Newton, the simultaneous founding of differential calculus by Leibniz—all these novelties, this mathematical in a narrower sense, first became possible and above all necessary on the grounds of the basically mathematical character of the thinking. (293)

As the “fundamental presupposition of the knowledge of things” (278), the role of the mathematical is not at all dissimilar from the role previously played by the Church. Prior to the mathematical, “the authoritative truth was considered that of Church and faith. The means for the proper knowledge of beings were obtained by the way of the interpretation of the sources of revelation, the writ and the tradition of the Church” (295). Since both the Church and the mathematical each “expressly intends to explicate itself as the standard of all thought and to

establish the rules which thereby arise” (299), the mathematical ought to be thought of as a “will to a new formation and self-grounding of the form of knowledge” (295). Hence Joyce’s interest in staging “Ithaca” as a *scientific* catechism.

* * *

The episode itself arrives in the wake of Stephen and Bloom’s Nighttown adventure in “Circe,” as well as their brief stop at the cabman’s shelter in “Eumaeus.” The two make their way back to Bloom’s home at 7 Eccles Street, leading the catechetical mode to begin by asking,

What parallel courses did Bloom and Stephen follow returning?

Starting united both at normal walking pace from Beresford place they followed in the order named Lower and Middle Gardiner streets and Mountjoy square, west: then, at reduced pace, each bearing left, Gardiner’s place by an inadvertence as far as the farther corner of Temple street: then, at reduced pace with interruptions of halt, bearing right, Temple street, north, as far as Hardwicke place. Approaching, disparate, at relaxed walking pace, they crossed both the circus before George’s church diametrically, the chord in any circle being less than the arc which it subtends. (17.1-10)

From the start, the mathematical character of the chapter comes to the fore. The narrator’s description of their courses reflects an obsession with “relations of space, time, and motion,” as it uses references to the cardinal directions, left, right, as well as their respective paces (“normal,” “reduced”, and “relaxed”). The answer also ends by mentioning a geometric theorem, connecting mathematical thought to mathematics more narrowly. What is most striking about the passage, however, is how the excess of mathematical detail ends up communicating very little. The reader learns nothing of their thoughts, of what was discussed, and of how the two characters got on.

The chapter tries to fill in these blanks by proceeding with the questioning, now asking “Of what did the duumvirate deliberate during their itinerary?” (17.11). This question returns a list: “Music, literature, Ireland...” (17.12), and this answer prompts more questions: “Did Bloom discover factors of similarity between their respective like and unlike reactions to experience?” (17.18-19), “Were their views on some points divergent?” (17.27), “Was there one point on which their views were equal and negative?” (17.43). The unending barrage of questions reflects a latent belief that continuing to ask the right questions can ultimately provide a full and total picture, which is possible because every answer is presumed to also be a full and total response to the question posed. This presumption holds true, however, only within the mathematical domain which determines which “things are taken as, what and how they are to be evaluated beforehand.” The question “What did Bloom do?” (17.123) exemplifies this limitation in scope, since its answer details how Bloom “kindled [the fire] at three projecting points of paper with one ignited lucifer match, thereby releasing the potential energy contained in the fuel by allowing its carbon and hydrogen elements to enter into free union with oxygen of the air” (17.130-33). Its description of Bloom’s action is limited to the relevant physical and chemical phenomena, which in no way create a full picture. Within the mathematical domain, however, the answer more than suffices.

Joyce also plays with the way in which mathematical thought fails to recognize its limitations and perseveres in asking faulty questions that its method has no means of adequately answering. At one point the chapter asks, “What discrete succession of images did Stephen meanwhile perceive” (17.108), and answers,

Reclined against the area railings he perceived through the transparent kitchen panes a man regulating a gasflame of 14 CP, a man lighting a candle of 1 CP, a man moving in turn each of his two boots, a man leaving the kitchen holding a candle. (17.109-12)

The question's use of "discrete" performs much of the ideological work since it denies the continuity of consciousness and reflects a belief that Stephen's visual perceptions can be atomized into cleanly severed chunks. The answer takes its cue from the question, arranging the "discrete succession of images" in a list and imposing its will-to-atomization on the actions of the man Stephen happened to see. In its repeated use of the indefinite "a man," however, the answer nowhere clarifies that this happens to be the same man. This underscores a lack of object permanence, creating a sense of a "constant present" out of which no temporal narrative can be woven. This, of course, is quite unlike human existence, highlighting an incongruity between the mathematical and the things it nevertheless attempts to colonize.

Returning to the method's description of Stephen and Bloom's conversation, the constant refinement of the questions illustrates another point: there is always a supplement—something the previous question does not ask, and, because it does not ask, does not allow for as an answer—and this requires another question. Joyce emphasizes this process of deferral—both through the asking of other questions and the implication of other phenomena—as the chapter asks, after Bloom turns on the faucet, "Did it flow?" (17.163). The answer initially appears to be a terse "Yes" (17.164), but a paragraph soon follows that traces the water's travel. It moved from "Roundwood reservoir in county Wicklow," through "a subterranean aqueduct," to "the 26 acre reservoir at Stillorgan," finally arriving at "the city boundary at Eustace bridge" (17.164-70). The mention of Eustace bridge prompts a discussion of low water levels, which implicates the prohibitions enacted by the "borough surveyor and waterworks engineer, Mr Spencer Harty,

C.E,” which prompts a mention of the “wastage of 20,000 gallons per night” by the South Dublin Gardens, which was confirmed by “the affirmation of the law agent of the corporation, Mr Ignatius Rice, solicitor” (17.170-81). There is an impossibility of total atomization since one question and answer calls for another, and even within a question the mention of one phenomenon implicates another. The circle never closes.

This is especially true when the answer is itself a question. Later in the episode as Bloom readies for bed, the chapter asks, “What selfinvolved enigma did Bloom risen...not comprehend?” (17.2063-65). The question-answer is “Who was M‘Intosh?”, which recollects the mysterious character from “Hades.” This question-answer cannot be answered with any authority, and it seems as though Joyce’s purpose is to impose a limit on the method of inquiry that cannot not possibly be overcome. This calls to mind Heidegger’s argument from “On the Essence of Truth” that “Wherever the concealment of beings as a whole is conceded only as a limit that occasionally announces itself, concealing as a fundamental occurrence has sunk into forgottenness” (132). In this way, Joyce indirectly approaches the concealing that always already occurs as things “show themselves” within the mathematical domain, although the mathematical only recognizes concealment when unresolvable enigmas like M‘Intosh’s identity are raised.

Joyce once again tackles the impossibility of closing the circle by detailing the mathematical’s attempt to exhaust all possible meanings of an inexhaustible concept: universality. Following the “Did it flow?” question and answer, the episode now asks “What in water did Bloom, waterlover, drawer of water, watercarrier, returning to the range, admire?” (17.183-84). Bloom apparently admires “Its universality,” and the answer attempts—over the course of more than a page—to list the things that might coalesce into an idea of universality: “its democratic equality and constancy to its nature in seeking its own level (17.185); “its

hydrokinetic turgidity in neap and spring tides” (17.190-91); “the simplicity of its composition, two constituent parts of hydrogen with one constituent part of oxygen” (17.211-12); “its solidity in glaciers, icebergs, icefloes” (17.220); “the noxiousness of its effluvia in lacustrine marshes, pestilential fens, faded flower water, stagnant pools in the waning moon” (17.227-28); etc.. In detailing the different forms that water takes when seen through different lenses or when appearing in different contexts, the answer becomes a meditation on contingency and the impossibility of enumerating *all* the contexts where water might find itself and *all* the forms that it might take. It becomes startlingly clear that “universality” is not a concept that can be adequately described, since there will always be a supplement to any partial interpretation of it. Once again, the mathematical method nevertheless exhibits an immodest confidence in its ability to complete this impossible task.

In his careful construction of the episode, Joyce also demonstrates a concern that the mathematical tries to apply its method to interpretive questions, ones where the imposition of a single logic in search of an authoritative answer runs counter to the nature of the material being dealt with. At one point in the text, the episode asks regarding Bloom,

What qualifying considerations allayed his perturbations?

The difficulties of interpretation since the significance of any event followed its occurrence as variably as the acoustic report followed the electrical discharge and of counter estimating against an actual loss by failure to interpret the total sum of possible losses proceeding originally from a successful interpretation. (17.342-47)

The scientific language disfigures the passage, making its meaning opaque, but its gist is clear. It analogizes the “difficulties of interpretation” to the variability of an “acoustic report”

following an “electrical discharge,” and shrouds a notion perhaps similar to concealment in the language of “counter estimating” and “the total sum of possible losses.” Bloom in the past had tried this method, and he “reflected on the pleasures derived from literature of instruction rather than of amusement as he himself had applied to the works of William Shakespeare more than once for the solution of difficult problems in imaginary or real life” (17.384-87). The chapter asks whether Bloom found a “solution” (17.388) to these problems, and “In spite of careful and repeated reading of certain classical passages, aided by a glossary, he had derived imperfect conviction from the text, the answers not bearing in all points” (17.389-91). The use of a glossary seems noteworthy, given its use in prescribing a limited set of possible meanings and proscribing play in interpretation and use. It also harkens back to the mocking mentions of Samuel Johnson’s dictionary in “Proteus.” Bloom’s analysis only yields “imperfect conviction from the text,” indicating that a certain kind of art seems resistant to a mathematical approach.

As it is with art, so it is with humanity. Joyce lays claim to human life as an inherently interpretive act, impervious to any power standing over and above it, when Bloom offers Stephen a place to stay for the night. Stephen, in exile from both his family home and the rooms he keeps with Buck Mulligan and Haines, “Promptly, inexplicably, with amicability, gratefully” (17.955) declines the offer. The answer’s claim that Stephen’s response was “inexplicable” belies a conviction that something like “reason rightly understood” ought to determine the course of his actions and exhibits an inability to cope with anything that might lack a “rational” explanation. Far from representing an embrace of outright arbitrariness and nihilism, however, Stephen’s answer was given “with amicability, gratefully,” indicating his recognition of Bloom’s kind generosity. This is an exhibition of care towards Bloom, in the Heideggerian sense, as Stephen demonstrates an attentiveness to the desires and concerns of Bloom’s world. This momentary

conjoining of worlds hints at the idea that our sense of right and wrong—as well as the ideas, values, and norms we take to be important—are deeply embedded in a social and cultural context that works to shape our collective social world. The danger of the mathematical or the theological—as *scientia* and *theologia universalium*—then lies in their threat to be the “standard of all thought and to establish the rules which thereby arise,” annihilating the diversity that enriches human life. Heidegger—quoting from the poet Hölderlin a phrase that poignantly relates life, art, and language—says that “we are an uninterpreted sign” (“What Calls for Thinking” 377). To surrender to a *scientia* or *theologia universalis* would be to fix in advance an existential, metaphysical, and normative conception of our lives (to pre-interpret ourselves as a sign) and to insist on an understanding whose source of truth is independent of and external to ourselves (to allow something else to do the interpreting). This abdicates the responsibility of existential interpretation that Heidegger celebrates as central to the being of Dasein and vests power—in a way that Joyce critiques as oppressive—in some foreign authority.

The episode approaches the Joycean critique by asking whether “human life was infinitely perfectible” (17.993), a question which Bloom quickly answers in the negative. It poses a similar question to Stephen—asking “Did Stephen participate in his dejection?” (17.1011)—although his answer is more enigmatic and contains two possibly contradictory responses. Stephen first “affirmed his significance as a conscious rational animal proceeding syllogistically from the known to the unknown” (17.1012-13), which clearly recalls his skeptical ambling in “Proteus.” Heidegger offers of this Cartesian approach that Descartes, like Stephen, “does not doubt because he is a skeptic; rather, he must become a doubter because he posits the mathematical as the absolute ground and seeks for all knowledge a foundation that will be in accord with it” (“Modern Science, Mathematics, and Metaphysics” 301).

The newly revealed mathematical character of “Proteus” adds to the chords struck by the various Catholic fragments that supersaturate Stephen’s thought in the chapter. The comforting certitude of the Gloria, his pondering of “Creation from nothing,” and his invocation of the satanic “Will you be as gods?” all illustrate the vestigial power the Church still holds in configuring Stephen’s world, a power he has substituted for the mathematical. He is especially attuned, though, to the way in which the Church continues to configure the Irish world, something he experienced most directly with his mother. In “Telemachus,” Stephen recalls his refusal to pray at her bedside as she died (1.273-77), a denial which haunts him, literally: “No mother! Let me be and let me live” (1.279). The memory starts, however, not with a recollection of how the Church configured her understandings of metaphysical concepts—life, death, the power of prayer—but of her quotidian actions. As “Memories beset his brooding brain” (1.265-66), he first recalls “Her glass of water from the kitchen tap when she had approached the sacrament” (1.266-67), indicating that she “had scrupulously observed the injunction to fast until after the ceremony” (Gifford 19). It is clear that Joyce saw the Church not only as something that provided answers to life’s greatest mysteries, but as a force with an omnivorous appetite, feasting on as much of life’s material as it could.

The second half of Stephen’s answer, however, seems diametrically opposed to the first. He apparently also sees himself as a “conscious rational reagent between a micro and macrocosm ineluctably constructed upon the incertitude of the void” (17.1013-15). A recognition of the “incertitude of the void” rings as an endorsement of the notion that there is no solid foundation for a universal knowledge or truth, but the scientific language that cloaks the idea warns that “Even the assurance that something is inexplicable belongs to these explanations and proofs” (“Letter on Humanism” 223). Whether it is Stephen or the mathematical method of the chapter

that seeks this assurance is unclear, but indications of Stephen's aesthetics elsewhere in *Ulysses* call into question whether he would be likely to fully embrace an unresolvable mystery. Buck Mulligan only half-jokes in "Telemachus" that Stephen "proves by algebra" his theories about Hamlet (1.555), and Stephen's virtuoso performance in "Scylla & Charybdis" demonstrates his willingness to read the tea leaves Shakespeare left in his plays.

Stephen's contradictory answer also brings attention to other paradoxical moments in the episode: "full masculine feminine passive active hand" (17.289-90), "jocoserious" (17.369), "the image of a solitary (isorelative) mutable (aliorelative) man" (17.1350). These all call to mind the Catholic teaching of hypostatic union, which explains how two natures, one fully human and one fully divine, exist in one substance or "hypostasis"—Christ's. The term "hypostasis" makes an appearance in "Ithaca" at line 783, as well as "Proteus" at line 124. Its location in "Proteus" seems particularly noteworthy, as it is adjacent to a mention of Dan Occam, who argued that the host turns into the body of Christ by faith and not by reason (Gifford 50). These enigmatic moments typify how paradox can be something performed only to be resolved or explained in such a way that the underlying paradigm is reinforced.

Elsewhere in *Ulysses*, Joyce seems critical of these neat resolutions since they deaden the affective power of the mystery or paradox. Bloom in "Hades" is a special witness to this, noting at Paddy Dignam's funeral that "It's all the same. Pallbearers, gold reins, requiem mass, firing a volley. Pomp of death" (6.498-89). The pre-determined repetition of ritual and the strict rules of dress that governed Catholic mourning at the time lead Bloom to feel that the entire affair has a mechanical character.

Even a mere admission of the “incertitude of the void” still marks a turning point in the chapter, and it is immediately succeeded by the only moment where artistic description ruptures through the mathematical method:

What spectacle confronted them when they, first the host, then the guest, emerged silently, doubly dark, from obscurity by a passage from the rere of the house into the penumbra of the garden?

The heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit. (17.1036-39)

As one does when staring at the stars, Bloom takes a few moments to ponder his place in an unimaginably large universe. His thoughts lead the chapter to ask,

His (Bloom’s) logical conclusion, having weighed the matter and allowing for possible error?

That it was not a heaventree, not a heavengrot, not a heavenbeast, not a heavenman. That it was a Utopia, there being no known method from the known to the unknown: an infinity renderable equally finite by the suppositious apposition of one or more bodies equally of the same and of different magnitudes: a mobility of illusory forms immobilised in space, remobilised in air: a past which possibly had ceased to exist as a present before its probably spectators had entered actual present existence. (17.1137-45)

Zena Meadowsong helpfully notes that “Bloom’s observation suggests...that the possibilities of the universe are infinite” (68). Since he rejects Stephen’s idea of “proceeding syllogistically from the known to the unknown” and instead asserts that there is “no known method from the known to the unknown,” Bloom “insists upon a condition of infinite possibility. Indeed, his recognition

of the limits of knowledge is itself the condition of utopia as the unknown, the unfathomable - a 'no-place' in a real sense" (Meadowsong 68).

Bloom's answer here, and Stephen's previous, make the question "What two temperaments did they individually represent?" and its corresponding answer, "The scientific. The artistic," difficult to interpret (17.559-60). At first glance, Stephen's actual artistic endeavors and Bloom's preoccupations with science and its application throughout *Ulysses* might make the answer clear. But the mathematical character of Stephen's thought and Bloom's belief in the infinite possibilities of the universe might lead to the opposite conclusion. A more reasoned answer, in classic Joycean fashion, is that they are each both. Perhaps the question meant this all along; the chapter's language, for all the precision demonstrated elsewhere, is fatally ambiguous here.

"Ask no questions, and you'll hear no lies."

Algorithmic Form: An Epilogue

The analysis contained in the previous three sections was largely limited to *Ulysses*'s content. But what of its form? Does it too reflect Joyce's epistemological and ontological convictions? Is *Ulysses* itself built upon "the incertitude of the void"? This chapter analyses two perspectives—that of Joseph Frank in his essay "Spatial Form in Modern Literature" and that of Jacques Derrida in his two famous essays on Joyce, "Ulysses Gramophone" and "Two Words for Joyce"—and uses Louise Amoore's *Cloud Ethics* to propose a new understanding of *Ulysses*'s properties as a text: algorithmic form.

"Wholes," "Unities," and "Proper Places": Joseph Frank's Spatial Form

Originally published in 1945, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature" was Joseph Frank's reaction to what he saw as a fundamental shift in the literary arts of his time. Gotthold Lessing's analysis of the differences between the plastic arts and literature anchors the essay, and Frank sought to apply Lessing's method to the modernist avant-garde of the early 20th century. Lessing's schema asserts that plastic arts are inherently spatial, and are thus best apprehended at once, whereas literature is linear and sequential, and is best understood over time as its narrative structure unfolds. Frank, however, noticing something revolutionary in Joyce, Eliot, Pound, and Proust, thought that their work "is moving in the direction of spatial form...All these writers ideally intend the reader to apprehend their work spatially, in a moment of time, rather than a sequence" (786-87). Key to this claim is the idea that "aesthetic form is not an external arrangement provided by a set of traditional rules. Rather it is the relation between the sensuous nature of the art medium and the conditions of human perception" (786). Notably, Frank's quasi-phenomenal approach chooses to focus on sensuous perception as opposed to a sort of semiotic

perception, which would focus on how the art becomes intelligible and meaningful as opposed to merely sensuously perceived.

Specific to *Ulysses*, Frank claims that “Joyce composed his novel of a vast number of references and cross references that relate to each other independently of the time sequence of the narrative” (791). This works to create a web of loose ends that “must be connected by the reader and viewed as a whole before the book fits together into any meaningful pattern” (791). Frank seems convinced that this “whole” is a static structure, and that any reader as they proceed through *Ulysses* is “continually fitting fragments together and keeping allusions in mind until, by reflexive reference, he can link them to their complements” (792). This notion of “complements,” whether wittingly or unwittingly, constructs a binary mode of interpretation: a connection between a reference and possible complement is either correct or incorrect. Extending this thread, Frank says it is “only after the book has been read” that “all the references are fitted into their proper places and grasped as a unity” (792). For Frank, there is no void in *Ulysses*. Its encyclopedic breadth and its fragmentary references can all be “properly” indexed and processed, leaving no excess or supplement outside of this “unity.” This renders any reading of *Ulysses* a passive process, where readers “gradually” become “*aware of the pattern of relationships*” (792, italics added). Frank confidently concludes, “But the fact remains that Joyce, in his unbelievably laborious fragmentation of narrative structure, proceeded on the assumption that a unified spatial apprehension of his work would ultimately be possible” (792).

Frank’s orientation towards the famous Joyce quote—“I’ve put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant”—seems clear. It might take a while, but the puzzles are solvable, the proper complements can be decided.

Competency, Complexity and the “(Asymptotic) Totality of the Equivocal”: Jacques Derrida on Joyce

Contra Frank, Derrida thinks there *is* some sort of void at the center of *Ulysses*, that Joyce, even though he desperately wanted a “Joyce industry” to search for references and argue about their proper complements, also fatally sabotaged its possibility. Writing about Joyce and Joyce scholarship, Derrida claims that “as with God and the Tower of Babel, it is an institution which he did everything he could to make impossible and improbable in its very principle, to deconstruct it in advance, even going as far as to undermine the very concept of competence, upon which one day an institutional legitimacy might be founded” (“Ulysses Gramophone” 268). Instead of answers, all Derrida can muster are questions: “...but in the end what does competence come down to in the case of Joyce?” (“Ulysses Gramophone” 280).

Of issue for Derrida is the word *yes*, a word brings the whole structure crashing down once it is caught in the gears of *Ulysses*’s encyclopedic machine. *Yes* is at the same time both empty and capacious, for it “is difficult to say something very definite, and certainly metalinguistic on this odd word, *yes*, which names nothing, describes nothing, whose grammatical and semantic status is most enigmatic” (“Ulysses Gramophone” 265). All that one can say, Derrida is convinced, is that “*Yes* always has the meaning, the function, the mission of an answer, even if this answer, as we shall also see, sometimes has the force of an originary and unconditional commitment” (“Ulysses Gramophone” 265). But in order for *yes* to have the force of commitment—“In order for the *yes* of affirmation, assent, consent, alliance, of engagement, signature, or gift to have the value it has”—it must somehow assure its receiver that it is that kind of *yes*, and that it is not an ironic *yes*, not a sardonic *yes*, not any other tonality of *yes* that

yes, in its empty and capacious capacity, can take on (“Ulysses Gramophone” 276). *Yes* must somehow mean *yes*, *yes*.

This creates a problem for Frank’s notion of a “unity” or “whole,” and it complicates any idea of Joycean expertise and competence. If *yes* “holds open the circle that it institutes” (“Ulysses Gramophone” 302), an infinite number of lacunae, moments of non-closure, open up in the text. Molly’s final *yes* is perhaps the most obvious: does it “carry the repetition within itself” and signal a new commitment to her marriage with Bloom (“Ulysses Gramophone” 276), or is it an indulgent, orgasmic, and much more vacuous *yes*, a transient and ephemeral moment soon to evaporate in the passing of time? Even posing the question in this either-or structure elides the numerous resonances one could conjure up. And Molly’s *yes* is not alone; the mysterious M‘Intosh, Bloom’s unfinished “I. AM. A.” at the end of “Nausicaa,” Mr. Breen’s enigmatic “U. p: up” postcard: all of these and others “hold open the circle,” ensuring “the *vibration* of an event which *succeeds only in asking*” (“Ulysses Gramophone” 305). Paradoxically, these lacunae both make possible the “Joyce industry”—their mysteriousness demands expert interpretation—but also foreclose any possibility of true competency. For “Competence,” according to Derrida, “implies that a metadiscourse is possible, neutral, and *univocal* with regard to a field of objectivity,” (“Ulysses Gramophone” 282, italics added). Though Frank might hope for a univocal *Ulysses*, the structure of the *yes* and the moments of non-closure “are capable—it is their destination—of destroying the very root of this competency, of this legitimacy, of its domestic interiority” (“Ulysses Gramophone” 282). Their existence works to ensure the impossibility of univocality.

Working in tandem with the impossibility of competence and the inescapability of non-closure are *Ulysses*’s encyclopedic ambitions. This combination makes *Ulysses* complex, as the

word is understood by complexity theorists. Paul Cilliers helpfully explains the difference between “complicated” and “complex,” offering that

If a system—despite the fact that it may consist of a huge number of components—can be given a complete description in terms of its individual constituents, such a system is merely complicated. Things like jumbo jets or computers are *complicated*. In a *complex* system, on the other hand, the interaction among constituents of the system, and the interaction between the system and its environment, are of such a nature that the system as a whole cannot be fully understood simply by analysing its components. Moreover, these relationships are not fixed, but shift and change, often as a result of self-organisation. This can result in novel features, usually referred to in terms of *emergent properties*. (Cilliers viii-ix)

Ulysses achieves complexity because in it “the virtual totality of experience—of meaning, of history, of the symbolic, of languages, and of writings, the great cycle and the great encyclopedia of cultures, scenes, and affects, in short, the sum total of all totals—*tends to unfold itself and reconstitute itself by playing out all its possible combinations*” (“Ulysses Gramophone” 291, italics added). The analysis of the previous chapters—touching on the eclectic coterie of Aristotle, Samuel Johnson, George Berkeley, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* and Thomas Henry Huxley—testifies to this. The intricate and complex web of references creates what Derrida calls an “overpotentialized text” (“Ulysses Gramophone” 281), which allows the text to renew itself as new connections and new potentials are read into it. Even as *Ulysses* attempts to create a “totality of the equivocal,” this totality is inescapably “asymptotic.” (“Two Words for Joyce” 149). Since, as Cilliers suggests, the whole “cannot be fully understood simply by analysing its components” and its relationships “are not fixed, but shift and change,” there is

always a “remainder that is both quasi-transcendental and supplementary” (“Ulysses Gramophone” 291)—*Ulysses* approaches totality but never touches it.

Even in the 1980s, Derrida reached for metaphors of programming, computation, and computers in order to understand how to make meaning out of this “overpotentialized text.” He talks of Joyce’s “preprogramming,” which in its complex, Protean functions even contains “*traces of the future*” (“Ulysses Gramophone” 281). Since *Ulysses*’s web of relationships can constantly shape-shift by generating different sets of connections, “nothing can be invented *on the subject* of Joyce. Everything we can say about *Ulysses*...has already been anticipated” (“Ulysses Gramophone” 281). He also talks of the limitations of the computers of his day, claiming even if “we could give the computer reading-head relevant instructions to pick up subtle changes in tone, a thing which is doubtful in itself, the over-marking of every *yes* with the remains of a quasi-transcendental, *yes*-laughter can no longer give rise to diacritical detection ruled by binary logic” (“Ulysses Gramophone” 307). Presciently, however, Derrida suggests that a computer which could “calculate the speed with which a mark, a marked piece of information, is placed in contact with another in the same word or from one end of the book to the other” would in fact “be the double or the simulation of the event ‘Joyce’, the name of Joyce, the signed work, the Joyce software today, joyceware” (“Two Words for Joyce” 147-8). In today’s age, algorithms, neural networks, and other tools—in other words, “joyceware”—have emerged to help make sense out of complexity. Their existence and methods do not resolve Derrida’s pointed arguments—creating a firm ground for univocal competency in the face of complexity remains impossible—but they help elucidate the way in which we make sense out of multiplicity, and reduce something inexhaustible into something specific.

Algorithmic Hermeneutics and Algorithmic Form: Louise Amoore's *Cloud Ethics*

Every reading of *Ulysses* is an algorithmic reading. Its form is algorithmic form. What sounds controversial merely suggests the following: that every reading of *Ulysses* must proceed abductively—using incomplete observations to produce best guesses, all the while retaining ample room for doubt; that the “references” and “complements” Frank thinks operate spatially are better thought of as operating recursively, with the constant reorganization and reinterpretation that method entails; that a reader cannot remain open to all the simultaneous possibilities of “the (asymptotic) totality of the equivocal” and must necessarily discriminate and assign priority to specific possibilities, and that these discriminations structure any reading in advance; and that though it is encyclopedic, *Ulysses* is incomplete—it is constantly re-written as it is reinscribed in new contexts, and these reinscriptions are as generative of its meaning as its own text.

Louise Amoore, Professor of Political Geography at Durham University, details in her book *Cloud Ethics* how algorithms have moved beyond “rules-based” structures to a process of “generative learning” where, with Amoore quoting computer scientist Rakesh Agrawal, algorithms now “generate all rules, and then debate which of them was interesting” (12). This steps crucially beyond Derrida’s understanding of computation—“we could give the computer reading-head relevant instructions...”—towards the one he theorized as “joyceware”: “A computer cannot today enumerate these interlacings, in spite of the many ways it can help us out. Only an as yet unheard-of computer could, by attempting to integrate with it, and therefore by adding to its own score, its other language and its other writing, *respond* to that in *Ulysses*” (“Ulysses Gramophone” 308).

The first relevant element of this “generative learning” process is that it proceeds abductively. Amore explains that “In contrast to a deductive form of reasoning by hypothesis testing, machine learning algorithms deploy abductive reasoning, so that what one will ask of the data is a product of the patterns and clusters derived from that data” (*Cloud Ethics* 47). What is significant about this process is that algorithms “respond” to the data they analyze in the way Derrida tried to anticipate. To note this is not to say that algorithms have secured a stable or more authoritative ground for interpretation, but rather is to suggest that *Ulysses*—with its complex, overdetermined web of references—invites and necessitates this mode of inquiry, and that any reading of it, whether done by a human or algorithm, follows this sort of structure. Abductive reasoning does not lend itself to positive verification of the proposed interpretations, and algorithms are “functioning today with the grain of doubt, allowing the uncertainties and variabilities of data to become the condition of possibility of learning and making decisions” (*Cloud Ethics* 134). This is an apt characterization of Joycean interpretation, where the impossibility of a univocal competency—the inescapability of doubt—is at the same time what generates the richness of its scholarship.

A second element of note is the recursive and iterative nature of this “generative learning.” As opposed to spatial form, which suggests that *Ulysses* can be understood “in a moment of time,” algorithmic form highlights that reading *Ulysses* is always a process, one with no definite end (in both its temporal and teleological meanings). Amore details how algorithms “identify clusters within the data (to read), derive attributes from those clusters to make them recognizable into the future (to resolve), and compare the output of the algorithms with the target output of the analyst (to reason).” She continues “This is an iterative and experimental process in which the humans and machines feel their way toward solutions and resolutions to otherwise

indelibly political situations and events” (*Cloud Ethics* 42-43). This entails a continuous back-and-forth, the “debate” mentioned by Agrawal, where the “playing out [of] all...possible combinations” theorized by Derrida helps discover not only which connections seem most fruitful, but also which interpretive understanding of those connections is most promising. A hermeneutic circle becomes not only a hermeneutic spiral, but a form whose plane and orientation constantly shifts.

Prior to any hermeneutics or interpretation, however, is a notion of how something ought to be understood in the first place. Amoore explains how this functions with algorithms, writing, “When deep neural network algorithms learn...they adjust themselves in relation to the features of their environment. To be clear, to learn, they have to weight some data elements of a feature space more than others—they have to have assumptions about how the world is ordered” (*Cloud Ethics* 74). Arguing over the best set of assumptions is what allows algorithms to “[translate] the input data from their environment into a ‘feature space,’ [map] the features into clusters of significance, and [extract] the object of interest for the action” (*Cloud Ethics* 58). These discriminating assumptions, then, function similarly to how Iser described the styles in “Oxen of the Sun,” which both select phenomena for interpretation and decide how they are to be evaluated. Seen in this light, “Oxen” is not a chapter *only* concerned with style as an inescapable fact of writing. Every reading or interpretation can also be said to have a style as well. Part of the utility of these assumptions, however, both for algorithms and interpretation, is that they function as a sort of “precomputation.” Quoting from a paper presented by the authors of the Dex-Net algorithm, Amoore notes that “The goal of cloud robotics” is to “pre-compute a set of robot grasps for each object,” making sure that “when the object is encountered, at least one grasp is achievable in the presence of clutter and occlusions” (*Cloud Ethics* 77). This stated goal makes

clear that “Machine learning algorithms do not merely recognize people and things in the sense of identifying—faces, threats, vehicles, animals, languages—they actively generate recognizability as such” (*Cloud Ethics* 69). With surprising resonance, Heidegger, in the section of *Being and Time* entitled *Understanding and Interpretation*, offers that “When something is understood but is still veiled, it becomes unveiled by an act of appropriation, and this is always done under the guidance of a point of view, which fixes that with regard to what is understood is to be interpreted” (*Being and Time* 32:188-89). The “fixing” accomplished by a “point of view” generates the recognizability and intelligibility detailed by Amore. Both of these descriptions lead to the conclusion that “Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us” (*Being and Time* 32:191-92). The mathematical is not alone, then, in relying on a projection of assumptions. Although Joyce is especially critical of how science and the Church proceed with their projections, his critique ultimately makes clear that in a text as overdetermined as his, all readings have a sense of what things in the text matter and how they matter, even if these notions are in a constant state of Protean flux as they are subjected to the abductive process already discussed.

The final component that constitutes *Ulysses*’s algorithmic form lies in the relationship between its authorship and its meaning. Amore notes that “in the context of how machine learning algorithms learn to recognize,” or rather how they generate recognizability, “the algorithm’s ways of being in the world are not all present in the code. Indeed, the effects of the algorithm are generative and emergent so that the source code is never complete.” She concludes, “the source is continually edited and rewritten through the algorithm’s engagement

with the world” (*Cloud Ethics* 87). A reading of *Ulysses* is algorithmic, then, in that the text itself cannot be passively read, but rather—as an “overpotentialized text”—demands an engagement that is generative of the connections that give it meaning. Almost every detail offers itself as a place of non-closure, allowing for constant reorganization and reconnection with other fragments of the text. Derrida asserts that this creates a “Paradoxical logic” which governs the relationship between Joyce’s writing and any writing *about* that writing:

...whatever the difference between them, even if...the ‘second’ text, the one which, fatally, refers to the other, quotes it, exploits it, parasites it and deciphers it, is no doubt the minute parcel *detached* from the other, the metonymic dwarf, the jester of the great anterior text...and yet it is also another set, quite other, bigger and more powerful than the all-powerful which it drags off and reinscribes elsewhere in order to defy its ascendancy. Every writing is at once the detached fragment of a software and a software more powerful than the other, a part larger than the whole of which it is a part. (“Two Words for Joyce” 148)

My hope is that this thesis, though exploitative and parasitic of Joyce’s writing in the way Derrida describes, succeeded in being more than a “jester of the great anterior text,” that it enlarged *Ulysses* and became “a part larger than the whole of which it is a part,” that its dialogue with Heidegger, Derrida, Amoore, and others might yet enable original readings of this “all-powerful”—but generous, unceasingly generous, excessively and frustratingly generous—novel.

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