

The Poetics of Thinking¹

Configuring “Principle” as distinct from “Concept” in poetry, theater, and art

Part One

Thinking ecoproprioception

We could say that practically all the problems of the human race
are due to the fact that thought is not proprioceptive.

[David Bohm](#)

Multiplicity of meaning is the element in which thought must move
in order to be strict thought.

[Martin Heidegger](#)

A notion like the poetics of thinking invites more than one genie out of the bottle. It could start by characterizing what the experience of being inside a thinker’s thought is like, which would be a phenomenology more than a poetics. In that sense it would be like describing reading Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space*² and realizing that in that compelling book he not only creates a way of reading poetry (a poetics), but his way of thinking about poetic experience—the actual quality of his mind registered in that work—itself embodies a poetics. It generates certain qualia. If you know the book well, reading any paragraph or page out of context would arouse the Bachelardian experience within you, just as hearing a familiar voice on the phone immediately induces the presence of that person in your mind. It has a sort of psychic DNA and it’s unmistakable. Yet like qualia in general, it’s hard to characterize—sort of like describing the color red to a blind person. To be sure, a way of thinking can be shown to have a style, but style hardly characterizes the experienced qualities. Describing a house doesn’t give the feel of living in it. Knowing any philosopher’s thought is inseparable from being very particularly inside the language of a thinking. That’s a phenomenon closely related to poetry. Any descriptive approach faces the problematic of translation. Yet the way we work with, or represent, a philosopher’s thought tends to detach from

the qualia and skip to the reductive abstraction, the bones of the system and not much of the flesh.

Heidegger of course has already cultivated this territory and created a massive body of work as an alternative to previous philosophical thinking. And it's a work with a poetics, indeed explicitly so to the degree that he embraced poetry as fundamental to what he exhibited as thinking, notably in [*What Is Called Thinking*](#) (Ger. 1954, Engl. 1968), but as well in the essays contained in [*Poetry, Language, Thought*](#) (1971). The poetry of thinking and the thinking of poetry comprise an endless mirroring, an unresolvable engagement not only happening *with* words but *inside* words—an evolving process with an unknown outcome. The complexity and enormity of Heidegger's work—or, alternatively, Whitehead, Blanchot, Derrida, Deleuze...—could easily absorb our concerns and set us here on a path—a “conversation on a country path” between us and a previous thinker—that would play out nuances of a particular philosopher's exploration; and it would rest pretty much on those terms; that is, inside their poetics. But in an important sense that would be to miss the advantage of such poetics-thinking, namely, to follow a path of thinking that *presents itself*. It's a path that runs inside experienced language here now.

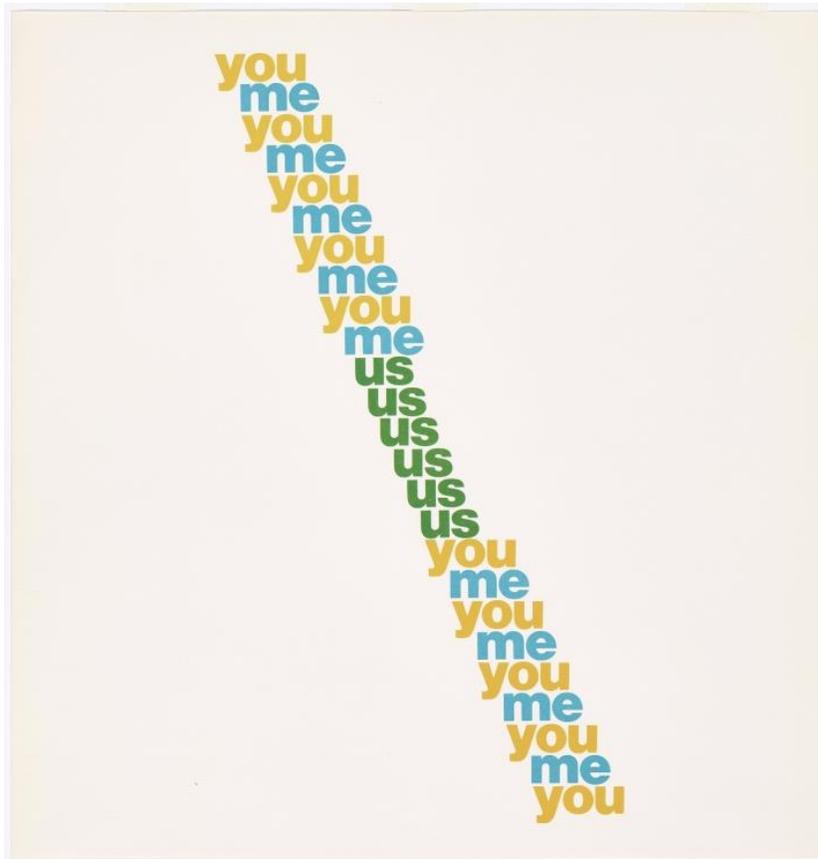
If there is no thinking without language, as is often claimed, then language must extend far beyond words, beyond even gesture and signing, beyond body language (voluntary and involuntary), indeed well beyond the human—and not particularly in the sense of the “post-human.” Animals, including whales, birds, and insects, as well as plants are now acknowledged by ever more scientists to have intelligence, cognition, communicative systems, even language with something like syntax (e.g., the greater spot-nosed monkey of Nigeria).³ Communication probably starts most often with body language, and of course signing amongst the deaf is fully evolved on a par with verbal language. Eastern mudra comprise ancient, highly complex and articulate language systematics which conventionally “refer” to, or possibly connect with, the nature of mind beyond ordinary sensing. Thinking and language/chicken and egg—or the other way around.

In an even more basic sense, we “think” within the body in more areas than the brain, as in kinesiology and gut feelings, the latter famously argued by Michael Gershon, MD to be “the second brain,” the enteric nervous system.⁴ Some say a pianist thinks with hands since decisions are made in less time than it takes for a neurological signal’s return-trip to the brain, but biologist [Mae-Wan Ho](#) proposes an explanation in field-thinking, a “quantum coherence” of whole-body thinking through the pervasive medium of liquid crystal (collagen).⁵ Perhaps [proprioception](#), the body’s complex ability to sense itself, is already a kind of body thinking at a level that we don’t recognize as coherently cognitive; like with piano hands, decisions are far too quick to track. However we decide this issue, it offers an attractive model, as Charles Olson suggested,⁶ to think further about poetics and its relation to thinking in a range of understandings. And it’s a model subject to extension.

For many years I’ve practiced within an evolving poetics related to what Wallace Stevens called “The [poem of the mind](#) in the act of finding/What will suffice....” I take this to mean that a function of poetry is to reveal what can be thought/experienced in mind through language, indeed to make new thinking possible or even to discover new dimensions of the thinkable, beyond all categories. This approach hardly aims to prove anything at the positivist or factual level of science, yet science offers interesting possibilities for rethinking thinking. It is no more necessary to believe in science than religion—or the overt and covert dogmas supporting each—in order to enjoy and use the thinkings they make possible. The need, indeed the hunger, for poetry is in some sense inseparable from what urges knowing at all levels. So, in the interest of new language thinkings, let’s consider a sort of continuum.

Viewing the thinkable world as “description” rather than “fact,” the continuum at one end, roughly, is science, the positivist’s observable world, psychology, and philosophy—those things created to satisfy our need for a consensual “real.” At the other end is the imaginable, including the most extremely unverifiable, the many species of “non-ordinary reality,” including unprecedented instances of art, dance, poetry, music, etc. At this end of the continuum are “realities” for which only special consensus is possible—and where agreement is shaky at best. We can lay that continuum on top of any broad

conceptualized domain like *thinking* or *poetry*, where, for instance, the thinking inside language designated as poetry may freely move anywhere along the continuum. A poetic act can range widely therein, from, say, a direct political poem with a clear message to a Pataphysical one with an inconclusive (non-)message, and there's nothing to stop the poem from weaving between such extremes with its own kind of unforeseeable coherence. The mind may register a thinking event within that act which opens a door to further unprecedented thinking—one that *suffices* by revealing what was never even clearly desired. What if human evolution is the result of such acts and we are predisposed not only to optimize but to radically reveal what we didn't know we could be? That's a leap, like going from no-legged to four-legged to two-legged. There's a proprioception, a specific inherent system of self-owning, operative within all n-legged creatures. And, as it were, within-between them, co-performatively, inter-morphogenetically (by field), with (co)intelligence preset to evolve. Otherwise how did we get to be us? This kind of question drives an inquiry into thinking *ecoproprioception*.



Ian Hamilton Finlay, "You/Me," lithograph from *The Blue and the Brown Poems* (New York: Atlantic Richfield Company & Jargon Press, 1968). Currently showing in *Concrete Poetry: Words and Sounds in Graphic Space* at the Getty Research Institute. Curated by Nancy Perloff, assisted by Christina Aube.

Our consensual sense of proprioception looks at self/body as a self-enclosed system, which is a science-convenient way of looking at it; however, it preempts the question of the nature of self. Phenomenologically, self-knowing is continuous with our interaction with environment, since every act, down to the most minute intimate movement, is context specific and conditioned by multiple external and internal factors. And, like the body, language by its nature is always already a threshold between mind and world—and, in that sense, co-originating. *My* language is never not *our* language.

The liminality of thinking in language is embodied in what might be called the “natural” ambiguity of language.⁷ Positivist language philosophy laments the imprecision and ambiguity of language as a failure of unambiguous communicability, but polysemy also functions as a protection against deeper imprecision—the failure of language to represent the shifting nuances and subtle interactivities of actual ever-changing experience. A poet might observe that language seems to *know* that nailing down “truth” you nail our feet to the floor. A poetics of thinking can recognize that positivist “imprecision” of language as a resource of thought realization, and one that poetry represents in *discovery through processual embodiment of variables (polymorphia)*. A key aspect of this process at the level of poetics is feedback facilitated by listening and reflection, considered here as a conscious version of proprioception.

Choosing to think in terms of a proprioceptive system is not an end in itself but a conceptual convenience pointing to a *biopsychical principle* of self-knowing. It can and should be speculatively linked to other science-based concepts, such as the fairly new and preliminary concept of a [mirror neuron system](#). These conceptual tools naming physical systems are appropriated here towards a reflective thinking and a poetics of resonance behavior. And they intend to offer a self-guiding swerve around aesthetic traps in thinking. At least for now.

My immediate aim is to track the experience of thinking for what it indicates about thinking in language, but language extending beyond any particular delimitation. Many, perhaps most, responses to music and poetry occur first without much thinking, that is, without cognitive mediation. The latter may primarily come during interruptions, sudden thoughts, and later interpretation. Big exceptions to this occur when the work itself, say, Gertrude Stein's [Stanzas in Meditation](#), Jackson Mac Low's [154 Forties](#), or Franz Kamin's [Scribble Death](#), is processually self-interruptive, inviting a self-reflective thinking-in-process as part of the basic flow of the work. This can set up a sort of conscious proprioceptive engagement, a mirroring back of complexity such that conscious participation experiences itself as *like* the complexity — a reflexive insight into and a mirroring of readerly self nature. Is such complex self-reflective experience rooted in the body? Olson, we recall, like Blake in another way, sought to tie poetic process directly to body awareness. I'm suggesting that, at the end of *Jerusalem*, in what Blake calls "Visionary Forms Dramatic," reader mirrors poet/poem in actually undergoing the biopsychonautic event. Such an experience can be lastingly consciousness-altering.

Consider the distinctions "motor empathy" and "cognitive empathy" — involuntary yawning when seeing someone yawn as distinct from being moved by another's emotion or excited by expression of an idea like your own — indicating how deeply and complexly embedded in bodymind is our direct (involuntary) mirroring of others. This mirroring has been [connected to mirror neurons](#) in the brain: someone smiles, I smile: a phenomenon thought to be important in the evolution and development of language. Far beyond "monkey see, monkey do," it's a veritable [emotional contagion](#), and Blake saw this mirroring as a profound phenomenon: "We become what we behold."

What is curiously compelling is that this kind of mirroring is not confined to the distinction "human"; it has play rather broadly in the natural world. The notion of "[monkey see, monkey do](#)" is a folk-based saying from the 1920s reflecting ancient awareness of interspecies mimicry: stick out your tongue and a macaque will stick out his. Mirror neurons in action. On another level it's what accomplished musicians do when improvising, but at a different level, one that includes conscious variability—a

sort of musical mindreading co-performativity. (Neurobiologists call this “Theory of Mind” meaning our capacity to sense what others are experiencing.) The musician David Rothenberg, author of [Why Birds Sing](#), has experimented with “[interspecies improvisation](#)” in remarkable ways, including with various birds as well as Humpback Whales, and in the latter interaction the whale song responded innovatively to the human clarinet, making sounds never before heard among Humpbacks; [listen to the recording](#) and, eerily, you will hear what has never been ... what? —sounded, heard, said, thought...? Humpbacks, like certain birds, are naturally innovative; male Humpbacks sing the same song until at a given time one whale changes it and the others entrain to the new song. Not previously observed is a whale entraining to human music-making and in the process making unprecedented sounds—experimental whale songs! This points to what I’m provisionally calling ecoproprioception—self experienced as other, as lived environment. Perhaps this points back to Darwin’s other theory of natural selection: not evolution by fit survival, but by attraction.⁸



A humpback whale breaches in the waters off of Maui.
Photo courtesy David Rothenberg.

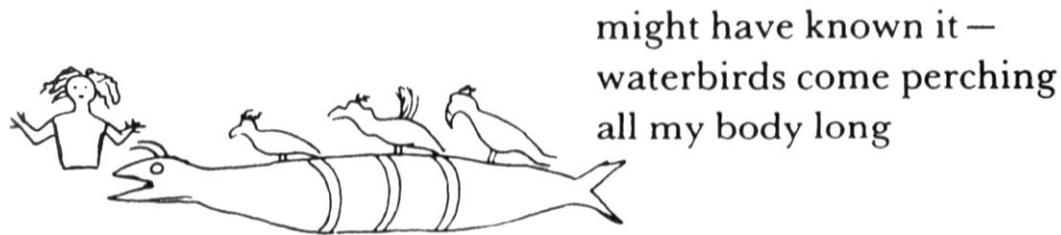
The implication is that the sense of self that systemically “self-knows”/proprioceives is not hard-bounded, and in intensive states of mirroring/co-performativity (like improvising music or language with others) self seems to expand to a level of non-separation from another. Examples of identification of self and others among animals

include dolphins, for instance, where an individual wounded and bleeding, thus endangering the group to attack when outnumbered by schools of sharks, sacrifices himself to let the group escape; this would be a “heroic” act in a human context (soldier throws himself on live grenade to save his buddies), but may well be the norm for dolphins. Acoustic biologist [Katy Payne](#) discovered that elephants make deep sounds below the threshold of human hearing to synchronize their movements with distant group members, which in my speculation is a sort of *field proprioception*. This phenomenon has been thought to both preserve group unity and to act ecologically, so that, say, fruit trees are not overharvested.⁹ I’m looking at this not as metaphor but as parallel biopsychic system generating ecoproprioceptive behavior and thinking.

Recently I wrote about instances of [proprioceptive poiesis](#) in the mature work of David Antin, Jackson Mac Low and Franz Kamin. At the advanced level of conscious poetics, this phenomenon, as I see it, involves a recognition process face-to-face with the neverbefore, now possible: *self-recognition in first seeing*. Reading in a space of radical newness involves a special kind of reciprocity, where the identification with text alters the reading mind: text invents reader as alternative self. The oscillation between minds in intensive conversation or between mind and unprecedented text can exhibit many levels of intensity, qualities, qualia. And in a state of reader-text non-separation the oscillation is so rapid and unnoticed (cognitively unmediated) that the boundary of self is pervious. In this state of openness self as normally conceived can think outside itself—self-thinking afield, ecoproprioceiving. It can discover something approaching *field mindfulness*.

Of course, active reciprocity with the natural world is part of culture worldwide—the rites, the shamanics, the songs—and shows up in many forms; but the way of registering these phenomena itself evolves and becomes part of the consciousness of those who participate in the translation process. Jerome Rothenberg’s epochal anthologies—beginning with [Technicians of the Sacred](#) (1968/2012) and [Shaking the Pumpkin](#) (1972/2014)—, along with the consequent creation of the field of ethnopoetics, have awakened a further awareness of the poetic interplay of human and

non-human. That interaction is broadly taken for granted in traditional/tribal contexts, as reflected in the poetry:



English version by Jerome Rothenberg, from Frances Densmore¹⁰

Field mindfulness, proprioceptive field thinking, suggests that the interactive dynamic may have a role in “evolving” poesis. In the work, for instance, of Jackson Mac Low, such as “[Vocabularies](#),” there was an interest in text as a generator of performance where the emphasis was on close listening between performers, somewhat like non-genre free music improvisation. Such open listening generates a self-modulating field sensitive to subtle verbal combinatory possibilities: new languaging, without semantic, syntactic, logical, or narrative dominance. And just as birds that develop singing in isolation produce songs which are less complex or nuanced than those learned with other birds, complexity in human language and communication appears to be a function of interaction with others. This follows a natural principle which I have long identified with *torsion*, first described by D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson in [On Growth and Form](#) (1917): a vine has to “couple” with oppositional structures, creating torque, in order to continue twining.¹¹ In the poems called *Forties*, Mac Low seems to have taken in the lessons of both interactive performance and early procedural, self-suspending writing (chance operations) to create a new kind of spontaneous page-based text, facilitated by notebook-writing in various environments, such as traveling abroad. The results are heteroglossic, multilingual, intricately (a)syntactic, and rhythmically “sprung.” The poems are scored sound-mind events for reading as performance in the sensorium. There’s an intrinsic liminality here between text and environment, page-writing as limen between internal language-music and active exterior world—page-space refocusing (self)awareness through surround sound/space/linguality. Here are the first

two stanzas from his *154 Forties*, #70, "Tree House City," which with characteristic thoroughness and context sensitivity he documents as written in "Vienna (Burggarten) & in a Danube hydrofoil passing Bratislava: 14, 18 April 1993; New York: 3 April-10 May 1995; 3, 10, 14 March 1998":¹²

70 TREE HOUSE CITY

FORTIES

Tree house pleasing alacrity tambourine Tálleyrand - praxis
Frénch-adjust features *Analog* morality anachronism Márshall Plan
knacker Tennessee *The Phantom of the Opera* a larger one iniquity
Caligari *Der Rósenkavalier* - excrescence Zweiter Tag* Alonzo Momo
phármacy Pulaski Skyway 1940 narrower walking snówmobile
Lísz-Abend opening férvor
*[TSVEY-t'r tahg (second day)]

Glance exactly mobile Lorca tórrént - marker forensic dícta
Latinatè ampersand dictionary Maryknoll cloaker mogul locale
femur replete effervescent Ephesian neatness counts analgesic
séeker-mEEK Zen StradivariouS* qualities teak ornithology Moscow Honorius morbid
a mournful palustrian séquence - rabbit
Glee Club penitence dreamwork
*[sic]

The mirror: Language reinvents itself through poetry, and poetry reinvents us.

Part Two

Thinking Theatre Inside Out

You enter the place called *theatre* or *playhouse* to see the play; you find your place there; then the play takes place. You yourself also come here to play, at least in your own mind, knowing that the play also takes place *inside you*. What's *out there* is also *in here*. Secretly, you *are* the theatre, the playhouse, the place of the play, where your own life may seem to be staged right before your eyes; and here, under cover of private

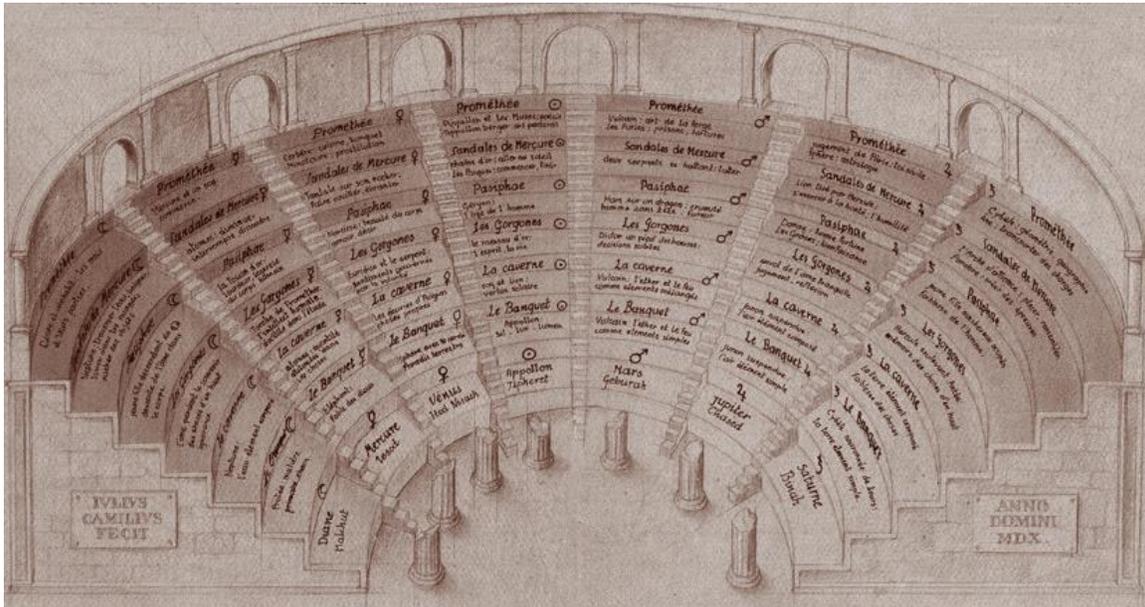
hiddenness, it gives up its secrets—if you have eyes to see. Your seeing eyes see both ways at once, the outer stage and the mirror stage within, the in/out threshold, the (double) ocular axis upon which your inner play plays out—the *thea* (Gk.), the view and the viewing that you, *theates* (Gk.), viewer, behold in the place of viewing. It's all you—well, it's also all the world.

And it's all me, and all not. We double, we straddle the threshold, confuse identities, we arc in the *viewing* between viewer and viewed, we spectators co-configure—we make theatre side-by-side, each with our own play running privately inside. What renders this spectacle so spectacularly possible? Somewhere in here there is a *root principle* difficult to define and resistant to names, and yet it *has language*. Is it knowable?—and, if it is, in what sense is it known? And can we tell each other about it?

The hinge here is language: the principle that *has language* and can speak itself also *is language*. That's the starting point in this inquiry into principle; the realization that *a principle shows itself in the language by which it is thought*. And that language has what should be recognized as a *poetics*.

Theatre—to begin at the declared beginning of so much experimental performance in unexampled formats, here represented as the [Theatre of More](#)¹³—is a word that carries a complex set of relationships, as indicated in its *viewer/viewing/viewed* etymology. A formulation like Giulio Camillo's sixteenth century *Teatro della Memoria* (1530) inherits a complex of traditions that play out the possibilities of viewing. This confluence of traditions includes the external site and architecture of the physical theatre; the ancient mnemonic systems (*ars memorativa* as mnemotechnics) that combine primarily rhetorical systems with architectural images and nomenclature; the variously developed, abstracted ancient rhetorical uses of mnemonics (Cicero, Quintilian); and the Hermetic tradition (Lull, Ficino) and magical and cabalistic practices able to incorporate mnemonic systematics in an esoteric agenda. The idea of *theatre* in this broad history involves a range of meanings from the most external viewing to the deepest internal visionary experience. The word itself comprises, as it were, a kind of continuum running between the “outer” and “inner” meanings, and as such it is a

threshold (*limen*) and site of liminality between extremes; here a Camillo can play out his drama of mind-theatre, its staged levels of “intellect” and “intention,” ranging from the practical to the divine, with magical aspirations always ready to lift the next curtain.

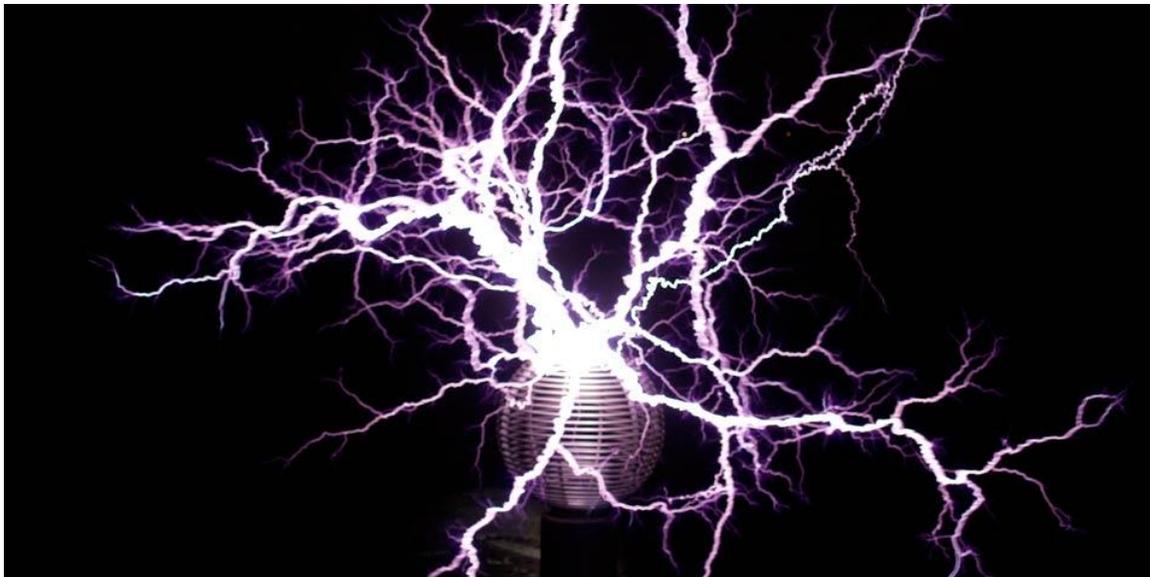


Camillo’s Theater of Memory: This [image of the Theatre as seen by Athanasius Kircher](#) shows clearly the 49 places (7 tiers x 7 “columns”) that would contain all knowledge in the theatre.

Memory/Memoria too is such a *logoic* threshold (if I may introduce a neutralizing term for “word language”). I view *memory*, like *theatre*, as what I call a *limen*, a liminal (non-)point of processual distinction within a continuum: on one hand, memory as rhetorical recall or as recollection (information retrieval) of facts, ideas, and rational formulations; and, on the other hand, memory as a site of restoration of powers, a return to fundamentals of one’s intrinsic nature, an initiation that is both a discovery and an uncovering. “Theatre of Memory” in the latter sense would be a site of what gets called magical, initiatic, and transformative experience, as indeed we may understand Camillo to have intended: *you go in as you and you come out as other*.

And in that sense there may be many subtle inheritors of such a “theatrical” tradition, perhaps including, say, Alfred Jarry’s ‘Pataphysics, Antonin Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty, Jerzy Grotowski’s “Objective Drama” and “Art as Vehicle,” along with those connected to the latter (Peter Brook, Richard Schechner), and many more. Indeed, one could see

certain performance artists here (e.g., Joseph Beuys, John Cage, Trisha Brown, Eiko and Koma, Marina Abramović, Carolee Schneemann, Julie Patton), and the list grows long as we locate the performative art that shares an initiatory/transformational principle somehow akin to that behind the Theatre of Memory—art that fundamentally alters the participant. This performative art, of course, is not only *performance* art, but any art that embodies in its very structure and mode of operation such a *non-ordinary experience principle*—an initiatory unfolding that takes place in the inner theatre of the participant.¹⁴ Many installation artists create initiatic spaces, such as the [Light and Space](#) group, including James Turrell, Robert Irwin, and [Eric Orr](#), especially the latter who created overtly initiatic installations like [Electrum](#): "The space itself changes you, instead of an object."¹⁵ (In Part Three we'll look closely at another sense of initiatic installation in the principle-based art of [Gary Hill](#).)



Eric Orr: [Electrum \(for Len Lye\)](#) (1997). New Zealand (Gibbs Farm): Tesla coil, stainless steel electrode on a fiberglass column support on a concrete base with tiled black granite 3 x 3 x 14m

In a different register, one might think of Marcel Proust in this context, his discovery/recovery of a “lost” paradisaic time-world through “involuntary memory” (via the *petite madeleine*)—this is something inspired, sudden, stunning, even life-changing, yet ultimately it is *ordinary* memory flying high. But subsequently there is his further discovery, formulation, and practice of “voluntary memory”—something entirely

different—a principle of intentional world-(re)creation that is anything but ordinary. It conducts its magical mystery tour, young Marcel’s “Magic Lantern” with amplified lumens, and searches out lost time only to transport us far beyond the temporal, travelers in visionary syntax.¹⁶

Yet “memory,” Proust notwithstanding, no longer carries well the esoterically performative end of that logoc continuum, and the literalized word *memory* is cut off from its excitable liminality (except in coded usage, e.g., G.I. Gurdjieff’s “self-remembering”). Similar reasoning seems to have contributed to Heinrich Nicolaus’s name for his collaborative/participatory project, the *Theatre of More* (ToM), resonating as it does with Theatre of Memory while avoiding tendentious or otherwise limiting associations that might compromise free participation. Given that it sets itself apart in this way, using a word (*More*) so broad and common as to seem adrift amidst free-ranging reference, what might be its operative principle? The question is partly rhetorical; that is, if *thinking* its emergence in this way is already to *engage* it. In the very fact of *thinking principle* it is necessarily active right here.

II

Execution is the Chariot of Genius.
William Blake

Thinking in this sense, as engagement and performativity of principle, is inseparable from the language that embodies it. We can hardly think about our thoughts or examine them without scrutinizing the thinking language itself. Language reflecting upon itself! Chastened as we are by Wittgenstein to not be fundamentalists of language—those who believe in words as fixed realities with consistent referents (except by strict consensus or assigned meaning, as in jargon or code, with specified application)—we labor to *participate* our thinking language *in process* and with *processual reflection*.¹⁷ This special use of *participate* (not followed by “in”) extends the post-Durkheim/Lévy-Brühl term of Owen Barfield—for experiencing phenomena without separating subject and object—to include a *willing liminality*, a standing between apparent contraries in order to openly inquire. This is where the poetics comes in, as the working principles of active coherence in any given discourse. And further, the *thinking principles*—the principles,

that is, behind thinking, but also principles engaged *in* thinking—principles themselves seeming to think independently of us. Here we are moving further toward our core concern, a *poetics of thinking*.

We can look at the words engaged in thinking language, for instance, as sites of energetic charge. They have *history* (including both etymology and known historical uses) and *context*, as noted above in the case of *theatre* and *memory*. Each of those words can be viewed as a continuum between extremes of meaning. Therefore they are sites of more or less continuous transition. And they are thresholds, what I have called *limens*, *logoi* zones of liminality. If we examine any given moment of thinking language, we may notice ourselves leaning to one side or another at the verge of distinction. In the example already discussed—the threshold concept “theatre”—I may be inside an actual theatre looking at the stage, seeing the play as objective performance before me and yet—mirror neurons firing away—feeling the emotional impact in a connection with personal experience, and I may even see this as *my* reality show playing itself out, while never losing track of the play *out there* as somebody else’s work. There may be many levels of this back-and-forth focus, one level no more difficult than walking and chewing gum at the same time, another level many-tiered with wider and wider circles of referential engagement, and then a reflective level, much like the thinking we are doing here, and then: what? A certain leap, a non-ordinary giant step, a break in the frame, shadows with no projective light, figurings and unnamables—*The apparition of these faces in the crowd; Petals on a wet, black bough*.

I resorted to poetry there, Ezra Pound’s celebrated “In a Station of the Metro” with its visionary moment in the underground, catching the memorable light of certain faces in the flashing dark, calling back, in “an instant of time,” lost souls from the underworld, Homer’s *Nekuia*, *The Odyssey*, Book XI, happening again in the mind, the dark inner theatre that at the far end crosses into death. It only takes one such experience, actually and powerfully realized, to transform a word for us—to make it a site again of a living continuum. To make it the *more* that opens us to a further knowing of our own being—and that, as we then can think it, is an instance of real theatre. *Theatre thinking*.

III

For this moment in thinking language we can go so far as to say that the principle of the *Theatre of More* and other new performance art is indeed a certain theatre thinking. It's a space in which a lot of different kinds of things happen over time with no particular commonality of theme or point of view or artistic style or form or historical claim or political position or scientific pretension or concept of archival completeness or universality or system of information retrieval ... you name it, it's not there, except as *more*. It lacks predictability. It makes for thinking. Thinking with a built-in *viewing space* in which many *viewers* focus on a certain *view*, here, now, in and of this moment. How? By way of an Art of More.

*Reason, or the ratio of all we have already known,
is not the same that it shall be when we know more.*
William Blake

More is an interesting word. It's practically the same in many languages—*ma* (Old English), *mo* (Middle English), *mehr* (German), *mas* (Spanish), *mor* (Old Irish)—*moros* (Greek), *mazja* (Avestan), and so on. No one can over-define it because all we can say is that what we have, so far, is less than it. Whatever we think about it is less than it already is by the time we say it, because it's *more*. The mind rushes ahead *toward* it. Thought is dislodged by it. Yet in that respect it's really like every word we use, because when we use it it's now more than it was; it now means *this*, yet just as *this is*, just now!—and quite clearly an instant later what we have said is already less than it. This is a pretty knotty affair, but have patience, it's telling us something about language.

Language is always being more as we use it, and it quickly leaves itself behind. It logo-degrades. Like thought. Like life. It hardly exists at all because, focused on *now*, it's confined to the no-space between less and more. The very thought of language calls into question the nature—nay, the very existence—of time, the present, an instant, the thought itself, as though, at the very threshold of *more*, there's hardly room for anything to *be* in time. Everything seems to be slipping out of time here, in this moment, in this theatre of thinking more.

Perhaps this is the principle of the Theatre of More and the radical root of theater itself: *theatre thinking at the threshold of time and no-time*. After all, the language of *thinking it* keeps pulling the mind back to this spaceless space in which everything is potentially memorialized and nothing is retained—because it happens at the edge of being more. Memory must inevitably record what is not yet complete, what already knows it must be more. So, where is this theatre and how do we remember where we are? You come in as yourself and you leave as other. As more.

It's as though the promise of more attracts thinking language to an unknown and unsayable further nature.

IV

Let's go back—well, that's not quite the right formulation at this juncture—let's go *on* with the way language itself is guiding us in configuring a principle of the present theatrical impulse. We are committed here in this joint enterprise to honor, to give priority to, the logocentric entity (okay, the *name*) that has attracted us to this spot: *Theatre of More*. We have been tracking its play. The transition from *memory* to *more*—

meMORyE

—a turn upon an invisible axis in language and thinking. You could say that there's a hidden space between *memory* and *more*. Turn the mind to the left and memory elucidates a world gone by—*more* now of what has been, remembered in a given moment. Turn the mind to the right and we're in the domain of what is only now dawning—recalling, at long last, what, now and now alone, can be *further*. This is what I call the *axis*, and the *axial moment*¹⁸—a moment, yes, but one with a curious *zero point* momentum, a force not quite, or not entirely, *in* time—or, rather, a force out of *undertime ... the apparition of these faces ...*

Well, anything can happen at zero point (which, of course, is not a “point”). There’s zero predictability. There are zero limitations—there’s nothing there!—it’s in-between.

Perhaps only the Japanese have created a place in language for the thinking that wants to happen here in the between. In Kunio Komparu’s great work, *The Noh Theatre: Principles and Perspectives*, a chapter is devoted to *ma* in which the range of meanings (from architecture to music) plays out as fundamental to the whole quite ancient phenomenon of Noh.

As an expression of **space**, *ma* can mean space itself, the dimension of a space, or the space between two things

As an expression of **time**, *ma* can mean time itself, the interval between two events, rhythm, or timing¹⁹

This variability, or what I prefer to call *axiality* (see note 11), suggests that in the case of *ma*, a long-standing usage recognized that space and time are “polar” in a very special sense. Space and time are at once separated *and* linked by a pole in the sense of axis, a common hinge on which they swivel into “normal” appearance, now as space, now as time, depending on the perspective—and, in a sudden anomalous moment, as space-time. Physics, broadly speaking, produces this anomaly in mainly cognitive/conceptual and abstract terms, whereas art (Noh, as Komparu’s analysis suggests) presents it sensorially/intuitively and concretely. And *this* polarity, no doubt, has a hidden axis as well, a swing point within *ma* viewed as *principle*, suggested by Komparu’s architecturally focused distinction in the subtitle, “*Ma: The Science of Time and Space.*” The science in the art becomes indicator of an art dimension of science—a liminality function at the level of *ma* as principle, which shows up in the dynamic marriage of science (as theory *or* technology) and art—and, indeed, a certain indifference to the very distinction.²⁰

So, perhaps this is the (or a) principle of the Theatre of More: liminal theatre, a theatre of between, *ma*.

MA: The Science of Time & Space in Noh

"In the words of Kunio Komparu: "The *Noh* stage, as a space of complete openness where a shared experience occurs, permits *no separation of self and other*, however momentary, by the intrusion of 'enclosedness.'" (Komparu, 111) How similar this is to Deleuze's idea of a "decentered and divergent" harmony. This divergent harmony is at the heart of *Noh* music as well and describes the subtle lines of flight of its discrete elements. While Komparu's chapter the Music of *Noh* is well worth a read, I will try my best to attempt to summarize it here and try to point to its phenomenal implications. *The music of Noh also exists within the gaps* or as Komparu calls it *ma*, which roughly translated means blank, time or opening (you can think of space as well). Like many Japanese words its meaning is ambivalent and relies on ambient context. Words and Kanji or Chinese script are believed to have a pulse, hence the art of *Shodo*, calligraphy, and carry their own spirit or energy. The different

musical parts of *Noh* are simple. It is primarily rhythmic music, with eight beats constituting



a single unit, or what we in North America think of as measure. In our terms one quarter-note full beat actually corresponds to 1/8 note of sounds and 1/8 note of silence, respectively the down and upbeats or positive and negative time. Each measure begins on the upbeat, the silence which links the musical units together."

From: [Immanent Terrain](#)

V

The true original is always yet to come.
Ontonymous the Particular

Theatre, for all its *seeing* and *being seen*, is also a place with a memory of speaking—and being heard. From ancient times, it created a sense of *person* by way of masks and "speaking through" (*personando*) and of moving bodies and patterning energy. Language holds the center as the very possibility of *saying*, not necessarily, of course, with words, but also with movement, gesture, sound—and, at least since Artaud, theatre has remembered itself as a language of *more* than words. Gesture can speak as unambiguously *or* as ambiguously as words, and the meaning-continuum of sound and gesture is as intensive *and* extensive as words, semantics, syntax, rhetoric. Its memory theatre resides now, and primordially, in all that embodied being *says* itself to be, and in all the ways it now knows how. Its Art of More is a threshold of possibility. It is inherently innovative, although a self-image as avant-garde is a cultural artifact and not a sign of essence or relevance; nor is its value at issue in whether or not it's "been done

before” (as if for an actual artist that were even possible). Self-true language that speaks for itself is best understood as *inherently unexampled*. (No polemic or self-consciously crafted identity as “new” will lend it extra primordial thrust.) The artifactual mask is ever a site of speaking through. One could point to its poetic principle as

living language speaks for itself

And it hones itself not by technique or technology, but principally by remembering its singularity—by focusing, that is, inside its own axis. Its “craft” is a function of attention and intensity in the process of self-unveiling within the medium—a stripping bare (bride or not) of self that’s not particularly personal as such, yet stands true in the persona that *is sounding*. A happening in the space of an Art of More. A further theatricality that sees for itself.²¹

Here we come upon the persona as *impersona*, a theatre-entity whose very presence serves as a site of theatre thinking. Such a sounding-into-being is being born in performance, a sort of *play birth*, a birth at play, and uniquely within *the play*. A projective entity performative of birth itself, it shows our own birth as our most aggressive act, our matrix of further creativity. Theater in this sense arises as the great primordial self-extension—the original self-into-other-mirroring. (Think of Cocteau’s Orphée walking into the mirror!) This species of performatively embodied thinking language is drawn out in the perspective of *more*—it’s called out, so to speak, at the threshold of possibility, the lure of being, the irrepressible Pygmalion force, the eros of what can’t bear *not existing*. And it allows us to focus on a sense of *co-performativity* and, as ecoproceptive paradox, a *poetics of shared singularity*.



Cocteau's Orpheus entering the mirror (*Orphée*, 1950)

Part Three

The Principle of Principle Art

We've been saying a lot about principle, without ever having defined it. The reason is simple, so simple in fact that it eludes understanding for more than a moment or so at a time. A principle can never be defined definitively, because any given definition is itself only a manifestation of the principle itself, appearing to be outside it. But principle has no outside, and in this way it's rather like a Klein Bottle, a continuous one-surface reality that morphs as it goes. Indeed we only see its morphs, just as you never see *the force that through the green fuse drives the flower*. It also invisibly drives [the poem](#) by Dylan Thomas, which is in part its message, so structured, yet you *do* see the poem, or rather the words. There will be another poem, similarly visible and invisible, even if it should disavow it, saying things like *after the first death there is no other*: we know it lies to say what cannot be said, but must. That's how it works its principle of *more*.

There is obviously, in any given instance, a poetics of saying what we know to be there but can never point to directly. This is the whole problem of "higher" or "ultimate" or

“fundamental” matters. It’s no good to try to avoid it, which at best is only a more palatable or perhaps sophisticated game of charades. Nothing is solved by avoidance. Principle is here to stay.

I don’t really think it can be fully defined, but where not to say *something* only adds to confusion, I’ve made an effort:

Provisionally I would say principle is the basic or essential element determining the *evident functioning* of particular natural phenomena, mechanical processes, or art emergence.

Yet it’s as much a *force* as an element, depending on the context. It manifests not really as thing so much as event. Perhaps it happens at the event horizon. And a view of it does depend on context, which gives it a skin, an outside. But scratch that surface and it disappears. For principle is not so much a one-surface as a *no-surface* reality—until it *surfaces*. By the time we realize it’s there it may already look like a concept. The problem is, if it can’t be firmly identified, how can an artist use it and remain true to it? The answer: *the artist’s art knows how*.

The first opportunity to make some distinctions is to look at it art-historically, where in fact an understanding of principle-based art (which has apparently never called itself that, at least until now) can clear up some misunderstandings and reveal certain priorities that are rarely foregrounded. Once better understood, certain artists and their approaches may attract more accurate attention. However, this is unlikely to happen until we grasp better how principle (and, indeed, the principle of principle) works in the case of particular artists.²²

There is an obstacle in the complexity of the phenomenon of *conceptual art*, which of course takes many paths and, at this late date, has so integrated into a wide range of art practices that, except in the much discussed “classic” instances, it can hardly be distinguished as a separate phenomenon in contemporary art. This is not the place to address this complexity except in the broadest terms, focusing, a little further along

here, on a common denominator of much conceptual art for the purpose of distinguishing it from what I call *principle art*.

Axial, liminal, configurative: These three terms comprise both a complex *principle*, as I see it in its tripartite appearance, and a possible (but not necessary) sequence in the interrelated way that the principle unfolds in experience.²³ They also embody three ultimately inseparable aspects of a commitment to principle in art. Principle in this particular usage differs from “concept” and “conceptual” but is in no way opposed to them. An artist working from principle in this sense may also be working with concept, but they are not interchangeable terms. Of course, as the history of art particularly since the 1960s has shown, there is a range of possible ways of defining and using “concept” and “conceptual.” Yet we can notice in a number of cases that a concept is definitively represented by the work that it produces; indeed, one kind of conceptual “ideal” might be: one concept, one work. A principle, in contrast, cannot be fully defined by the work it produces or inspires or operates within. A principle can be endlessly renewed through well-defined yet non-definitive manifestations, and an endless variety of works can be produced out of it. Paradoxically a principle is not often well served by apparent repetition (unless the principle calls for it); a true manifestation of principle, the way I mean it here, is a singularity.²⁴

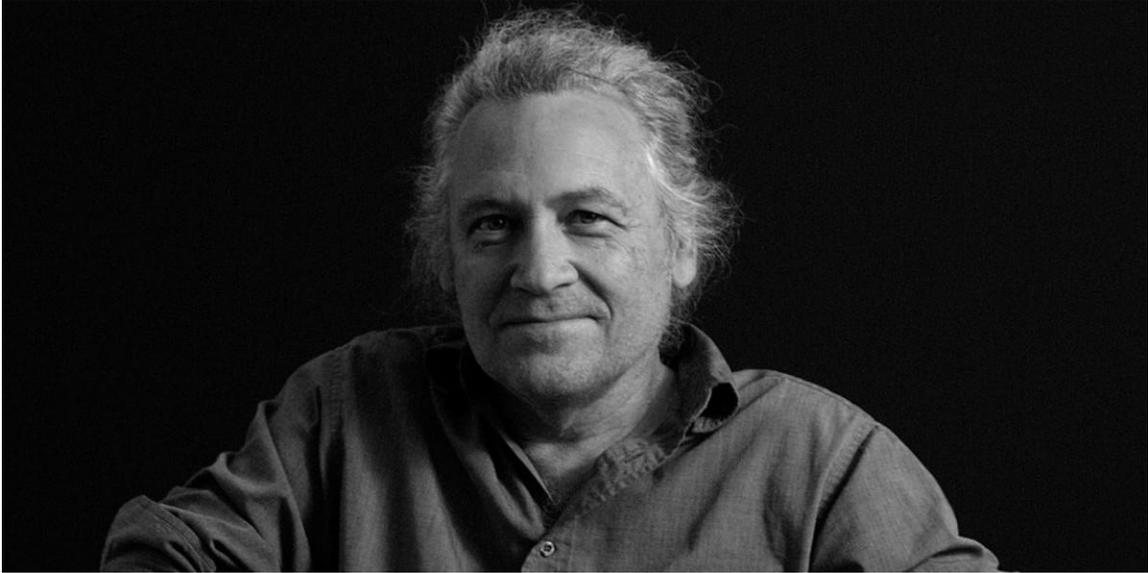
The principle of a principle-based work is not necessarily *prior* to, as “leading up to,” the practice. To be sure, a given principle, though not its conceptualization, in some sense had to already be there before the practice began; the decisive point is the artist’s discovery or direct awareness of it, which may or may not function as *motivation* for making the work. This would be a key distinction between *principle-based* art and *conceptual* art: the latter would seem by definition to be substantially in place prior to execution of the work. Work grounded in principle, by contrast, is neutral on this issue. A given principle work may have a strong conceptual focus at the beginning or not; but this basic fact—that it *can* be subject to processual evolution through open composition—alters the status of even its conceptual strategies. The root principle is open. In this regard, for instance, media/installation/performance artist Gary Hill has said of early, foundational work: “the space that I often attempt to work in ... [has made

it possible for] many of the single-channel works [to be] structured in such a way as to allow ... unpremeditated activity on my part in producing them.” And, discussing installation work like *Tall Ships* (1992):

My working methodology is not one of theorizing and then applying that to making art. In each work I find myself committed to a process that of course may involve material where ... philosophical issues may seem to be relevant. But I’m committed to the idea that the art event takes place within the process. One has to be open to that event and be able to kind of wander in it and feel it open up; to see it through until some kind of release feels inevitable.²⁵

This basic attitude may be seen as comparable to the approach of certain older artists who were working during his early development, say, Stan Brakhage in film; and in music: John Cage, Pauline Oliveros, La Monte Young, Terry Riley, John Coltrane, Cecil Taylor, or Marilyn Crispell come quickly to mind; in poetry, a very long list, to name some of the most obvious, begins with Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, Jackson Mac Low, Allen Ginsberg, Diane di Prima, Robert Kelly, Jerome Rothenberg, Susan Howe, David Antin, Nathaniel Mackey, Lyn Hejinian, Charles Stein, Adeena Karasick, or Will Alexander; and then, of course, there’s the “action painting” of the 1950s and 1960s, as well as a good deal of body and performance art (Yoko Ono, Carolee Schneemann, Vito Acconci, Linda Montano, Marina Abramović, Julie Patton, Chris Mann) from the 1960s on. (Many artists discussed as Conceptualists may be thought of more richly in relation to Principle or some hybrid of the two; Joseph Beuys comes to mind, among others.) Yet in matters of art principle it is not of primary interest to think by way of comparison or the idea of influence or the claim of priority, except incidentally, or as a way of being in touch with historically resonant event fields. An artist working from a matrix of free action and according to an emerging vision certainly *feeds* on art and thought, but that includes many *kinds* of art and thinking, beyond all anticipation.

The work itself as *limen*: The challenge of developing a practical criticism that reveals principle at work in certain artists is no simple matter, especially since consistency and repetition are not particularly virtuous in principle-based work. Yet we can take a small step in that direction here by way of an installation work by Gary Hill.



Gary Hill

Coming to terms with terms: The noun *limen*, threshold, has the meaning of *smallest detectable sensation*, the *unit* of what crosses the line. In physiology, psychology, or psychophysics, a limen or liminal (non-)point is a threshold of a physiological or psychological response. In this technical context, *liminal* means *situated at a sensory threshold*, hence barely perceptible. A limen is therefore close to *vanishing point*. This helps us understand the academic and social domains in which the concept of liminality has played a significant role, such as psychology, as noted, but also more loosely in the description “liminal personality” for someone “near the edge (or breaking point).” And in the social sciences, notably in anthropology, there is the work of Victor Turner, who has written influentially of its implications for social status, saying, for instance: “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.”²⁶ In a sense, a liminal person is “barely perceptible” and living at the social “vanishing point.”



Gary Hill's *Viewer*: In this 1996 video-projected installation—a title resonant with the etymology of *theatre* mentioned earlier, as well as certain core theatrical issues—I would point to a complexity of “staging” that bears upon a principle of liminality. *Viewer* projects the life-size images of seventeen marginalized men (mostly Latino, Native American, and Black day-workers) who obviously live near the social vanishing point. The men—as though waiting to be chosen for work, as they do daily, or, more ominously, in a police lineup, stand a bit uncomfortably facing out at viewers. When we view them seemingly viewing us, their eyes gazing into our art-inquiring eyes, we go straight into their liminality—and perhaps discover some portion of our own. The art space, itself a liminal zone (the outer banks of society at large), is *further liminalized* by virtue of our reflective empathy. We might say that we engage *marginal viewing*: there's our viewing their marginal status and their viewing back from the margin. At another level, perhaps there's our awakened self-view as belonging to the social class (gallery, museum, art market) that unfortunately contributes, however unintentionally, to their marginalization; and, quite possibly, the prospect of the momentary *reversal* of that in our opening our eyes to *them*. Maybe also there's our honest awareness that, only here in this liminal (but safe) space of art (as opposed to actually standing in front of them on a street corner), do we get to be *this* kind of viewer, in all its resonance. In this very moment, standing as we are at the threshold of self-awareness, the *viewing* is the limen,

the barely appearing crossing point into newly reflective awareness. And the work, *Viewer*, is itself the limen--the actual threshold--that makes all this happen.

In general, as well as in most of the specific ways that I have referred to it, *liminality* is a concept, a cognitive frame within which we understand, or apperceive, various relationships of center (self/entity) and periphery (other/world). It also stands for, indeed *signals*, the *act of framing* that allows us to mentally stand back and reflect upon an open state of objectifying—to grasp, for instance, that some objects are non-ordinary and demand special attention, perhaps even new orders of attention—*singular acts of attending*. We can recognize *liminal objects* without really knowing what they are. We grant them, at least provisionally, an honored status. And we find ourselves in dialogue with othernesses, states of oscillatory engagement with unnamables—and maybe it makes us want to speak out, even out loud, and talk with unknown things, alien objects. At a certain point in this process, such as when we realize that the object before us, the *work or opus*, is itself a liminality, a limen, a unitary agent of some kind of energetic exchange at an edge, or transformative or transportive event, or indeed *synergy*. At that point *liminality as concept* has become *liminality as principle*. The merely *thinkable* has become a unique kind of *doable*, an event at large, something happening with perhaps unclear agency. And once we see this we can give up trying to know what it is in advance of experiencing its actual instance. Singularity shows up as possible.

The point of laying out this notion of the work itself as limen, its embodiment of liminality at the level of principle, is to signal a shift in view. In a sense, a work that functions as limen—as vehicle of liminalizing our very state of participation—is already a further threshold, a crossing point to a unique state that cannot have been before its (this) very moment. We may even be arriving here at a threshold of “social sculpture” in the publically impactful sense of Joseph Beuys, which in the present discourse is an ecoproprioceptive act. This would be an aspect of the shifted, and shifting, view and viewership. The work is always a further instance of itself—which is why it is open, completely incomplete, *able*, that is, to be incomplete through the fact of interminable completeness. The work is “living” in the sense that it is self-regenerating and non-repeating. It’s facing out on the world is consequential.

We may see our role here, not as “art criticism/history,” but *functional* within the historical stream of art. In that sense it is what I (along with Charles Stein) have often called the *further life of the work*. The object we are discussing is changing as we speak, even *in* what we are saying. And how do we convey that status but by taking responsibility for it? Further life comes through co-performance, for which there is a critical discipline: it arises from within the work itself, peculiar to responsibility understood as precise responsiveness. Or as the poet Robert Duncan put it: “Responsibility is keeping the ability to respond.”

The resonance of principle art is felt in the thinking it inspires—thinking that *further*s its realization. This excursion into a resonant field tracks the inauguration of projects—*Theatre of More, Viewer*—to explore their alignment with a practice of *principle thinking*. That thinking, its search for a possible poetics, is always turning and situating itself within its axis, always playing itself out at the edge, and always configuring itself and the reality before it. This brings us to the beginning of the inquiry as further ecoproprioception.

¹ As a preliminary effort to explore this notion and its relation to proprioception/ecoproprioception and poetics, I have incorporated and adapted an earlier, shorter piece to larger purposes, “Configuring Principle,” published in a theater context, *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* (Vol. 32, No. 3, September 2010), p.72-84.

² Maria Jolas’ great translation first appeared in The Orion Press edition in 1964, a Beacon Press paperback in 1969, and subsequently in 1994. French edition *La poétique de l’espace*, Presses Universitaires de France (1958).

³ *The Times* (London: May 18, 2006), p.3. For an overview see Jeremy Narby, *Intelligence in Nature: An Inquiry Into Knowledge* (Penguin Random House: New York, 2006) and the PBS Nature documentary, *What Plants Talk About*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrrSAC-vjG4>.

⁴ *The Second Brain: The Scientific Basis of Gut Instinct and a Groundbreaking New Understanding of Nervous Disorders of the Stomach and Intestines* (Harper: New York, 1998); see also the PDF excerpt: http://www.cumc.columbia.edu/psjournal/archive/archives/jour_v19no2/second.html.

⁵ Mae-Wan Ho, “Quantum Coherence and Conscious Experience,” <http://www.i-sis.org.uk/brainde.php>.

⁶ Charles Olson, *Collected Prose*, eds. Donald Allen, Benjamin Friedlander, intro. Robert Creeley (University of California Press: Oakland, 1997).

⁷ Freud embraced ambiguity as a key to his approach in *The Interpretation of Dreams*; see his [The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words](#). William Empson's influential [Seven Types of Ambiguity](#) (1930) was a major starting point for understanding the role of ambiguity in poetry and language itself, and of course, because it is part of the nature of language, ambiguity is beyond typology and infinitely variable. Empson favored a certain analytical literary approach to ambiguity which is both expansive and limiting, but his deeper message must be that ambiguity is inseparable from a language's ability to serve ever-changing realities. Heidegger, as quoted, saw "multiplicity" as intrinsic to thinking, as indeed does a Whitehead or Deleuze approach in different ways. See Marjorie Perloff's useful reframing of Empson (via Michael Wood) in "[The Codebreaker: On the Critical Legacy of William Empson](#)" in *The Weekly Standard*, April 10, 2017.

⁸ See Richard Doyle's *Darwin's Pharmacy: Sex, Plants, and the Evolution of the Noosphere* (University of Washington Press: Seattle, 2011) for a rich exploration of attraction and discourse ("ecodelia") as factors in evolution. Musical "protolanguage"/"musilanguage" are recent terms relating what was thought by Darwin, and still by recent evolutionary musicologist/biologists', as comprising the stage leading to human development of language. Darwin writes in [The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex](#) (1871):

"When we treat of sexual selection we shall see that primeval man, or rather some early progenitor of man, probably first used his voice in producing true musical cadences, that is in singing, as do some of the gibbon-apes at the present day; and we may conclude from a widely-spread analogy, that this power would have been especially exerted during the courtship of the sexes,—would have expressed various emotions, such as love, jealousy, triumph,—and would have served as a challenge to rivals. It is, therefore, probable that the imitation of musical cries by articulate sounds may have given rise to words expressive of various complex emotions."

⁹ See also <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/brp/elephant/cyclotis/language/dictionary.html>.

¹⁰ *Shaking the Pumpkin: Traditional Poetry of the Indian North America*, ed. Jerome Rothenberg (Station Hill Press Archive Edition: Barrytown, New York, 2014), p. 275.

¹¹ The chapter "The Shapes of Horns, and of Teeth or Tusks: with a Note on Torsion" inspired my study of Blake's prophecies: "[Orc as a Fiery Paradigm of Poetic Torsion](#)" in *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic* (Princeton University Press: 1970), ed. David V. Erdman & John T. Grant. Torsion theory was a forerunner of the axial principle.

¹² Ed. Anne Tardos (Counterpath: Denver, 2012), 140-41.

¹³ Heinrich Nicolaus's *ToM: Theatre of More* was a White Box (Bowery, NYC) exhibition (June 17–September 13, 2009), curated by Juan Puentes in collaboration with Wolf Guenter Thiel, focused on public dialogue and collaboration with a range of local and international artists, actors, architects, musicians, film/video makers, new media artists, writers, fashionistas, magicians, etc. Nicolaus also highlights the ideas of experts on Renaissance art and theory, including Max Seidel, Silvana Seidel Menchi, and Gabrielle Perretta, and incorporates historical information furnished by archaeologist Lucia Donnini and architect Francis Levine, who reference and postulate a time when art provided for and explored undifferentiated notions of science, spirituality, and magic. Inspired by Giulio Camillo's *Il Teatro della Memoria* created in 1530, the multidisciplinary collaborative theatre piece ("21") depicts processes and events of the present world crisis related to the imbalance between the soul and the world (anima mundi) as a backdrop for a multitude of new and inspiring actions and endeavors. Nicolaus reflects to some extent upon the influential communal attitude found in Paul Thek's collaborative artworks produced in the Low Countries during his exiled European years following completion of his critical work *The Tomb-Death of a Hippie*.

¹⁴ Practically, the archetype of the mind-changing performative structure is William Blake's *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (1802). In a contemporary perspective, one could think

of the music too of Morton Feldman, Terry Riley, La Monte Young, Pauline Oliveros, Franz Kamin, etc.; or the poetry of Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, Jackson Mac Low, Gerrit Lansing, Kenneth Irby, Susan Howe, Robert Kelly, Charles Bernstein, Lyn Hejinian, Jerome Rothenberg, Nathaniel Mackey, Charles Stein, Will Alexander, Adina Karasick, etc. (But one would want to start not only with Blake but Goethe. Or James Joyce and Gertrude Stein. Or any number of Dada or Surrealist writers, indeed certain proto-surrealists such as René Daumal.) Or the film art of Stan Brakhage and Harry Smith. Yet the impulse here is not curatorial or anthological, but performative in the elucidation of a possibility in principle by which we may think.

¹⁵ Interview with Eric Orr & Alberta Chu, for documentary *Electrum*, 1997. I initially discovered Orr's work through Thomas McEville's great study, *Sculpture in the Age of Doubt* (Skyhorse Publishing: New York, 1999).

¹⁶ On the Theater of Memory the works of Frances Yates are fundamental, especially *The Art of Memory* (Routledge and Kegan Paul: 1966). Wouter Hanegraaff offers a divergent analysis of the history of esotericism in his important study, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2012). As part of his great trilogy of books (with *Imagining* and *Getting Back Into Place*), [Edward S. Casey's](#) work on memory is fundamental to the issues raised here: *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 2000).

¹⁷ My interest in the poetics of thinking as a particular domain was no doubt influenced in the mid-1960s by David Antin's sense of Wittgenstein as poet, reflected in his early book *Definitions* (1967), and a few years later in his approach to thinking in "talking" poetry. Marjorie Perloff's *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (University of Chicago: 1999) is a key study in this domain, and in a longer treatment, along with Wittgenstein himself and Antin, Perloff's book, which develops out of Wittgenstein's own remark that "philosophy ought really to be written only as a form of poetry," would deserve serious discussion.

¹⁸ Axis can be thought of on many levels, from the intimate scale of the body and its spine, to the way physical things line up or pile up vertically, to the grand scale of the earth turning on its axis and its physical and magnetic polarities: how bodies *are* in space over time. Issues come up immediately--of balance, alignment, gravity, stability, precariousness, danger.... The axis, in most instances, is not primarily a *thing*, if at all, but a way of understanding physical events (earth turning, upright body walking), a concept, and indeed a principle of dynamic orientation of a body amidst physical forces. I use the word "axial" at times to engage the sense of personal relationship to the presumed or observed existence of an axis, and the potential for relative "freedom" in movement. The axial (or axiality) stands for the opportunity of optimal (but not necessarily "maximal" and certainly not "ideal") *free movement*, and for the aligned "surrender" to gravity that also "releases"--polarizes--into *levity*; bipeds *rise* into uprightness. So, taking the notion further, the axial means *the conscious, radical self-alignment that liberates identity/work into its unknown further possibility*. As art principle, it's the freedom of an art action to discover possibility through a medium--to work optimally through its own physicality, focused on releasing singular awarenesses peculiar to the artist in a given medium at a given time and place. The axial principle does not suggest a style or aesthetic preference.

¹⁹ Kunio Komparu, *The Noh Theatre: Principles and Perspectives*, (Weatherhill/Tankosha: New York, 1983), pp. 70-95.

²⁰ Komparu himself was first a Noh actor in a long family lineage, who unexpectedly turned to writing as architectural critic, and just as unexpectedly returned eventually to the Noh theatre as actor. As one who crossed and recrossed a threshold between apparently incompatible disciplines, he was well-positioned to expose an infamous liminality within architecture itself in its science/art

polarity—often, indeed, a struggle. He does this in part by focusing on the profoundly architectural aspects of Noh.

²¹ The urgency of seeing for oneself has many expressions, one of the most extreme of which is filmmaker Stan Brakhage’s way of extending the etymology of *autopsy* by actually viewing one in [The Art of Seeing With One’s Own Eyes](#): a quite grotesquely “dramatic” facing of death where the “mask” that reveals the person becomes all-too-literal during the autopsy as the face is peeled off.

²² In collaboration with Charles Stein, I have taken steps in this direction in [An Art of Limina: Gary Hill’s Works and Writings](#) (Ediciones Polígrafa: Barcelona 2009). I have also written about it reflectively in relation to my own art practice: [Axial Stones: An Art of Precarious Balance](#) (North Atlantic Books: Berkeley, 2006).

²³ This section is adapted from the Prologue to *An Art of Limina* (previous note), so I have not attempted here a full exposition of the tripartite principle.

²⁴ For further discussion of the distinction between Conceptual and Principle, see my recent piece referring to the work of David Antin, Jackson Mac Low, and Franz Kamin, “[Poetry in Principle](#)” on The Poetry Foundation’s Harriet Blog. Fluxus artist Dick Higgins once created a conceptual work in a button with the words, “If you can’t do it twice you haven’t done it.” A reverse concept would better represent principle: “If you can do it twice you still haven’t done it.”

²⁵ Regina Cornwell, “Gary Hill: An Interview,” *Art Monthly* (October 1993); reprinted in *Gary Hill*, edited by Robert C. Morgan (A PAJ Book, The Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2000), p. 224ff.

²⁶ This sense of liminality was worked out independently of its usage in anthropology, which, while different in focus, is not incompatible with the concept as Charles Stein and I develop it. Victor Turner took the term from Arnold van Gennep’s threefold structure of ritual in *The Rites of Passage* (1909, 1960), and developed it in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (1969) and subsequent works. In the essay “Liminality and Communitas,” Turner notes: “Prophets and artists tend to be liminal and marginal people, ‘edgemen,’ who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing and enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination. In their productions we may catch glimpses of that unused evolutionary potential in mankind which has not yet been externalized or fixed in structure.”