

THE TIME OF THE SUBJECT IN THE
NEUROLOGICAL FIELD (I): A COMMENTARY ON
J.H. PRYNNE'S "AGAIN IN THE BLACK CLOUD"¹

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For Deborah Clark, Jessica Ruth Harris, and Lee Marshall,
Gonville and Caius, 1982-1985...pour l'amitié...

The clouds are white in a pale autumn sky.
J.H. Prynne, *The Oval Window*²

Espèce de soleils! tu songes: Voyez-les,
Ces pantins morphinés ...
Jules Laforgue, "Encore à cet astre"

a cloudless sky
J.H. Prynne, *Word Order*³

¹ The argument of this commentary on J.H. Prynne's "Again in the Black Cloud" has been presented in various public fora: first at the department of English and Related Literatures, University of York, England (at the invitation of Jim Mays); at the Alice Berlin Kaplan Center for the Humanities, Northwestern University; in seminars on "Reading Poetry" and "Modern Poetry" at Stonehill College, and most recently as a keynote address to the Graduate Student English Colloquium on "Vernal Temporalities" at Brooklyn College, CUNY in 2008.

² J.H. Prynne, *The Oval Window* (Cambridge, 1983), 29, rpd in *Poems* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1999), 334. In all cases quotations from Prynne's *oeuvre* will be to the original collected edition followed by its republication in *Poems*, hence *The Oval Window* (29 / 334) hereafter cited in text.

³ J.H. Prynne, *Word Order* (Kenilworth: Prest Roots Press, 1989), 12 and *Poems*, 365.

I

Attending a session of the MLA in Washington in 2000, I listened to Charles Altieri deliver a presentation on the reading of J.H. Prynne's poetry entitled "An Aspect of Prynne's Poetics: Autonomy as a Lyric Ideal."⁴ A striking feature of Altieri's presentation was the manner in which he would occasionally pause and comment on the number of times he had to quote from the poetry in order to proceed after each point – for each point was curiously large yet articulated through the local, often the linguistic local called the particle – before adding: "We used to do this a lot," that is, we professionals of literary reading used to comment on the poetry of our attention frequently *once upon a time*; and further: "It's as if this *kind* of poetry is written for this kind of reading. That doesn't happen any more." If I am not mistaken in my recollection, Altieri was having fun. We all know the *once upon a time* world of New Criticism implied by Alteri's aside just as we all know the critiques to which it has been subject and the subsequent openings in academic culture which are now regarded as acquisitions, which is to say irreversible, if not unthinkable so. Altieri, like Prynne, received his formation during the heyday of New Criticism, but neither is, nor has ever been, a devotee of New Criticism, for neither has ever confused the act, the reflexive act of close reading, with the *particular* formalism and limited ontology of New Criticism; indeed, both are readers of historical and formal sophistication for whom poetry is an epistemological and ontological performance in a decidedly non-foundationalist mode and hence an activity characterized by a certain kind of openness and opening. If, as Altieri said, "It's as if this *kind* of poetry is written for this kind of reading," the question becomes, "What is the kind of reading involved?" in relation to "What kind of poetry? And: What kind of poetic experience is it that commands the reading process, that is, which commands not only responsiveness but acts of attention?" This is where Altieri's concern with autonomy enters, the idea that Prynne's poetry, the difficulty of which has become all but fetishized,⁵ resists certain approaches, resists, indeed,

⁴ This presentation was subsequently published as Charles Altieri, "An Aspect of Prynne's Poetics: Autonomy as a Lyric Ideal," *The Gig*, no. 10 (December 2001), 38-51.

⁵ Whence the need for a return to the simplicity of a Douglas Oliver who, in his own opening and tentative reading of the poem "Of Movement Towards

certain methods – indeed, resists as vulgar the very idea of method – and compels the reader to search for, to uncover processes of attending uncharacteristic to procedures become habituations, and in so doing becomes an allegory for a conception of autonomy. The autonomy enacted through Prynne’s poetry is not, however, the autonomy of Adorno’s Critical Theory, as many would have one believe. To capture, to begin to articulate the modes and models of autonomy at work in Prynne’s poetry and poetics would indeed, *pace* Altieri, be to begin to grasp what it means to say that “this *kind* of poetry is written for this kind of reading,” that is, a poetic movement for which the manner of approach is the commentary whose focus is a highly delimited – object of commentary – yet *motivated* and reflexive movement, hence making of all relations not merely relations to be uncovered but relations to be construed. The problematic of an early formalist aesthetic such as one finds it in the poet-thinker Pierre Reverdy’s conception of Cubism, that is, that art constructs new relations, relations which are not to be found in the world before or independent of artistic vision – let us call this the core of an essentially constructivist vision – and it is this which is the meaning of autonomy, such a conception and its terms are no longer Prynne’s. There is indeed a question of the status of newness in Prynne’s poetic thought, and it is based in part upon the understanding of relations. There is, though, no trace of the Kantian “Analytic of the Beautiful” in Prynne’s poetics, and thus there is no conception of a formalism divorced from bodily experience and thereby desire as is made clear when Kant introduces the conception of disinterested perception:

The satisfaction that we combine with the representation of the existence of an object is called interest. Hence such a satisfaction always has at the same time a relation to the

a Natural Place” from *Wound Response*, observed that “J.H. Prynne’s poetry has sometimes been dismissed by reviewers who think that confessing their own lack of understanding permits them the arrogance of blind attack. But it has sometimes been stoutly defended by those who, understanding perhaps fitfully, have made his poetry’s difficulty or obscurity into a virtue,” before insisting that “the best way to restore a decent public discussion of Prynne’s work is to insist upon the most bald and obvious role of its meanings.” Douglas Oliver, “J.H. Prynne’s ‘Of Movement Toward a Natural Place,’” *Grosseteste Review*, vol. 12, 1979, 93.

faculty of desire, either as its determining ground or else as necessarily interconnected with its determining ground. But if the question is whether something is beautiful, one does not want to know whether there is anything that is or that could be at stake, for us or for someone else, in the existence of the thing, but rather how we judge in mere contemplation (intuition or reflection).⁶

For Kant, distinctively aesthetic pleasure is not bodily and so cannot entertain the *desire* through which something “could be at stake, for us or for someone else, in the existence of the thing.” Likewise for Reverdy, as revealed in his correspondence with the young poet-thinker André Breton, the body is to be minimized so that “the emotion for which you seek in a work is that which you have created yourself,” hence, in the same passage, Reverdy’s principled rejection of any notion of metamorphosis since this implies something pre-existent “and that is why there is talk of ellipsis. NO! There is no *metamorphosis* – there is synthesis, creation.”⁷ Of course, as would become clear within only three years (1922) since the composition of this letter (1919), there could be no Surrealism without metamorphosis, for everything in Surrealist experience depends to a high degree upon an *aisthesis* of metamorphosed relations – and yes, I shall be making comparisons between the poetics of a Prynne and the poetics of a Breton – from that of the threshold of dream/wakefulness, the relations between old and new (or the *démodé* in the new as Walter Benjamin grasped it through Surrealism), to larger relations between the everyday and the cosmological. In Prynne’s poetry, these relations can be economic and political (*Kitchen Poems*, 1968, say, but also *Brass*, 1971 and *Bands Around the Throat*, 1987), anthropological (“A Note on Metal,” 1968), ethnographic (as with *News of Warring Clans*, 1977), lyrical and alchemical (*The White Stones*, 1969; *A Night Square*, 1971; *The Land of*

⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, transs. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2000), 90.

⁷ Pierre Reverdy to André Breton, letter of 5 January 1919, quoted in Marguerite Bonnet, *André Breton: Naissance de l'aventure surréaliste* (Paris: José Corti, 1975), 132. Cf. Michael Stone-Richards, “Nominalism and Emotion in Reverdy’s Account of Cubism, 1917-1927,” in Malcolm Gee, ed., *Art Criticism Since 1900* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 97-115.

*Saint Martin*⁸), scientific (*The Oval Window*, 1983; *High Pink on Chrome*, 1975), imaginal and oneiric (*Into the Day*, 1972), imaginal and medical (*High Pink on Chrome*, 1975), biological (“The *Plant Time Manifold* Transcripts,” 1974), or medico-experimental, as with *Wound Response* (1974). It remains, though, that always at issue are questions of newness and subjection the basis of which are states of embodiment marked by *dispossession* which serve to problematize the subjective appropriation of experience.

The question of newness – which for Prynne is not *du Nouveau* – cannot be avoided in the understanding of the model of autonomy pertinent to this poetics, for which emergence (sudden or otherwise) would be a preferable term, and it is through this that we shall come directly to the poetry of *Wound Response* and in particular the poem “Again in the Black Cloud” as the object of our commentary. From Jena Romanticism onward, the *new* is not the *modern*, and to imagine the new is necessarily to conceive (and to imagine) generation from the old. The Schlegel brothers spoke of the “Kampf des Alten und des Neuen” (the struggle of the old and the new), not of the ancients and the moderns as well-established English colloquialism would have it. And this is important, for the issue in the development of Friedrich Schlegel’s theory of Romanticism is the possibility that old and new are properly anthropological categories, that is, constitutive of the human mind. We see the after life (*Nachleben*) of this profoundly Jena Romantic thinking in the Modernist conception of the archaic – in an Eliot, a Joyce, a Benjamin no less than the principal practitioners of Surrealism and, today, in the work of a Prynne. The *new* is what is archaic, or more tellingly, that which is *latent*, and so in a powerful sense timeless, precisely in the way in which, on the Freudian account, the unconscious is said to be *zeitlos*: without time, which German term has been translated by the French psycho-analyst Pierre Fédida as *passé anachronique* [lit. anachronised past], that is, a movement which anachronises tense and undoes syntactic governance to make pastness a permanently available present. As I have said, this is the view of Walter Benjamin who finds authority for it in Surrealism; it is, too, the view of Eliot in his 1923 essay “‘Ulysses,’ Order and Myth” which identifies in the method of Joyce’s Ulysses “a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and

⁸ *The Land of Saint Martin*, first published in *Poems* (Edinburgh: Agneau 2, 1982).

antiquity.” Indeed, Eliot, here very much the disciple of Baudelaire, goes on to argue that “Psychology [...], ethnology [...] have concurred to make possible what was impossible even a few years ago. Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art,” which is to say, available for the historical, reflexive consciousness which is a moving form made of sedimentations and relationalities, embodied temporalities. Subjection, that is, as Hegelian process.

What, then, is the emergent new, and what does it mean to say that the new, not being merely the modern (an ideological term, here), can only be conceived, imagined, in relation to the latent? Here we need to think in terms of theories of creativity: where creativity is thought of as the creation, bringing into the world of something that did not previously exist (this might be a version of Romanticism); or in terms of combination, where creativity is conceived in terms of the exploration of the structural properties of a medium (Baroque music, for example). The new cannot be held apart from accounts of creativity. In one sense, it is a perfectly obvious, even banal thing to identify the new with firstness – but firstness of what? Medium? Object? Even in the creation story of the Hebrew Bible God creates out of the stuff of the earth – dust in the language of the King James Bible – whilst in the Gospel according to John the Word (*Logos*) was with God. In other words, in the two most influential creation accounts in the western tradition, creation and newness are relational forms, and I should like to suggest that they are relational forms in an interesting way, that is, that they are underwritten by passivity, and it is through the conception of passivity appropriate to Prynne’s poetry that we shall arrive at an adequate comprehension of autonomy, for we shall see a thinking in which the mythical method (Eliot and Joyce) becomes transformed, made continuous with a medical approach in which, as we shall come to see, the conception of agency and feeling implied by the rich thinking of relation is not one uniquely or even distinctively identified with a personal subject. A conception of agency is explored in the poetic experience of Prynne’s oeuvre for which *Wound Response*, a middle period work, became the summation and *model*. Autonomy in the poetic infra-phenomenology deployed in this work is not an ideal but a model...and as such itself creative in the sense of generative – or projective – of its own possibilities.

II

Here, death borders on birth. Not the birth which has always already taken place, but the birth in the course of being produced [en train de se produire]. In hypnosis, death and birth are not past (they are not *present qua* past), but they are becoming past.

The essential determination of the state of passivity itself has a model, in truth more than a model: it is the state of the child in the body of its mother.

Jean-Luc Nancy, “Identité et tremblement”⁹

I should now like to go to this concern, this problematic of passivity, passivity as that which precedes, which is separate from man’s intentional activities and which in being so compels the re-thinking of agency, and I shall do so through a consideration of Prynne’s “Again in the Black Cloud” from *Wound Response*.

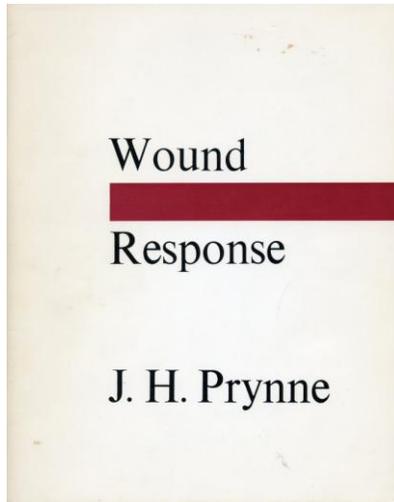


Fig. 1

⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, “Identité et tremblement,” in Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, Eric Michaud and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hypnoses* (Paris: Galilée, 1984), 32.

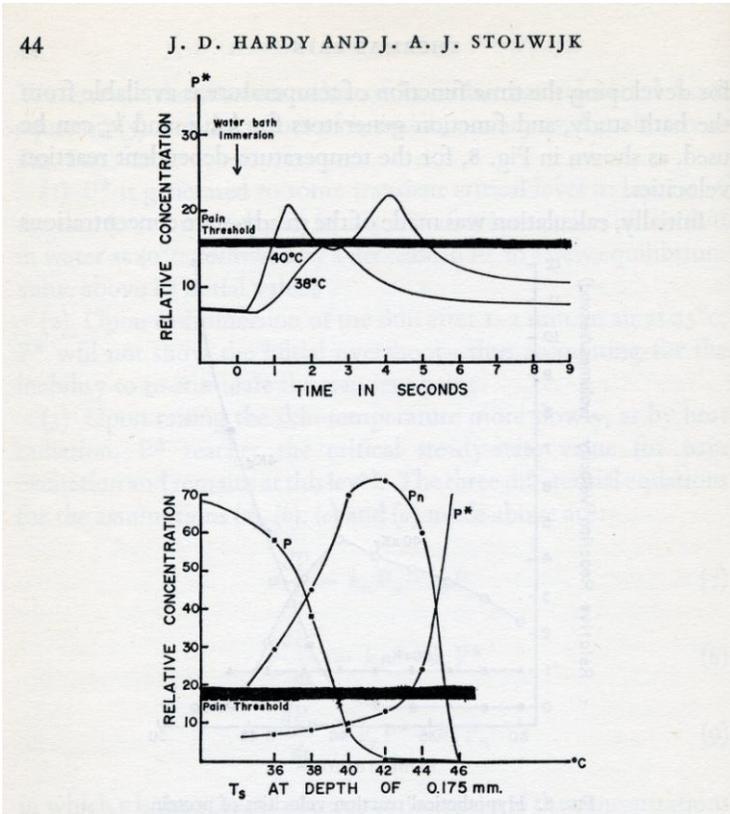


Fig. 2

The volume *Wound Response* was published in 1974 in an edition of four hundred copies by Street Editions, Cambridge. It comes with a plain, austere appearance: black lettering in Times New Roman on covers of white shiny (even glassy or hyaline) ground with a single rectangular band of purple red on the cover [fig. 1]. There are thirteen poems between pages 5 and 21 and a final prose work, “*The Plant Time Manifold Transcripts*,” between pages 24 (the title page) and 32. The book opens on an epigraph in prose the title of which is given with date, page number, but no author, as follows:

“Of particular interest in the present context are the observations made on patients whose middle ear had been opened in such a way that a cotton electrode soaked in the

normal saline solution could be placed near the cochlea. A total of 20 surgically operated ears were studied. Eleven patients heard pure tones whose pitch corresponded to the frequency of the sinusoidal voltage applied to the electrode....One patient reported gustatory sensations.”

Touch, Heat and Pain (1966), p.11¹⁰

The work from which the epigraph is taken, as is easily established, is the publication of the proceedings of a scientific symposium of the Ciba Foundation held in 1965: *Touch, Heat and Pain. A Ciba Foundation Symposium*, edited by A.V.S. de Reuck and Julie Knight (pp. xiii + 389, 124 illustrations, 295 references) with simultaneous publication in Boston (Little and Brown) and London (J. and A. Churchill) in 1966. It is useful, indeed, invaluable, to gain a sense of the contemporary response of professional scientists to this publication, for therein we shall find the first cues as to the nature, level and kind of engagement that is *Wound Response*. For example, for W. Ritchie Russell, in a one paragraph review:

This volume reports the proceedings of a symposium held in September 1965. The anatomy and physiology of sensation are both still, in many respects, *most obscure*, but the development of electron microscopy has at least contributed knowledge regarding the structure of nerve endings. Professor Lowenstein, as Chairman of this Symposium, referred to the proceedings as *a beginning of a conversation between the two populations of nerve cells – the peripheral and the central*. All interested in research on sensation should study this volume.¹¹

For Russell, then, it is the obscurity of the anatomy and physiology of sensation that warrants the attention of both scientist and reader and, it is suggested, given the obscurity it is, in the interim, as it were, fortunate that “the development of electron microscopy has at least

¹⁰ Epigraph to J.H. Prynne, *Wound Response* (Cambridge: Street Editions, 1974). All subsequent references to *Wound Response* will be in text as *WR* 3 / 215 followed by page number to the first collected edition then *Poems*.

¹¹ W. Ritchie Russell, review of *Touch, Heat and Pain*, in *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, vol. 60 (March 1967), 312. My emphases.

contributed knowledge regarding the structure of nerve endings,” which is to say, that the mechanism of magnification has provided a type and degree of measure for the exploration of the problem of sensation. The magnification of the nerve cells by electron microscopy makes observable the matter the problem of which remains *most obscure*. In the mean time, the proceedings, pace its chair, Professor Lowenstein, has set up the terms for the “beginning of a conversation between the two populations of nerve cells – the peripheral and the central,” which would be a conversation across part of the autonomous nervous system, whether in humans or animals, whence Michael Jukes contemporaneous review commenting on “Quilliam’s summary of the structure of organized receptors in the beaks, snouts and sex-organs of a wide variety of animals [which] demonstrates how much comparative physiology needs to be done.”¹² Jukes had opened his review by observing that “The title [*Touch, Heat and Pain*] is rather misleading. The subjects covered range from biophysics to psychophysics, but most papers deal with the structure and function of mechano-receptors and the impulse patterns which they produce in afferent fibres.”¹³ After specifying the range of the approaches covered in the symposium which the title may not suggest – biophysics and psychophysics – Jukes identifies one of the core concerns of the symposium and book, namely “thermoreceptors and the pain caused by chemicals applied to blister wounds and heat.”¹⁴ Anatomy, experimental physiology, biophysics and psychophysics centered upon the problem of pain through experimentally induced wounds: these are the scientific subjects of the Ciba Foundation symposium and book on *Touch, Heat and Pain*.¹⁵ There is, however, one other contemporaneous review that is worthy of mention, and it is one which takes the reader of *Wound Response* to the heart of the matter, and it is by Ruth E. Bowden, for whom the main field of inquiry is “the biophysical aspects of sensory function,” before adding the simple but telling observation that

¹² Michael Jukes, review of *Touch, Heat and Pain*, in *Experimental Physiology*, vol. 52 (January 1967), 100.

¹³ Michael Jukes, *ibid.*

¹⁴ Michael Jukes, *ibid.*

¹⁵ ... and zoology. The parody scientific discourse that shapes the presentation of “The *Plant-Time Manifold* Transcripts” which concludes *Wound Response* clearly takes the transcripts of discussions following each paper in *Touch, Heat and Pain* as the model for a type of colloquy.

The psychophysical approach is of particular importance since man is the only animal capable of describing his perceptions. It has also led to constructive attempts to quantify the apparent intensity of one sensory modality in terms of another. Cross-matching of modalities suggests that each perceptual continuum has a typical exponent the value of which is modified by changes in the parameters of experimental conditions.¹⁶

If the scientists participating in the Ciba Foundation symposium on *Touch, Heat and Pain* are extremely aware of the difficulty of measuring any form of sensation – still less pain, something evidenced in their many discussions on the problem of cross-modality matching – there is almost no awareness that the problem, in terms of their own concepts and preoccupations, may also be irretrievably one of language “since man is the only animal capable of describing his perceptions.” The chair of this symposium, Professor Loewenstein, in the discussion following S.S. Stevens’ presentation on “Transfer Function of the Skin and Muscle Senses,” the paper from which the epigraph to *Wound Response* is taken, begins his response by observing:

I have always had difficulties in understanding what psychologists and psycho-physicists meant by their various functions. I have a better “feel” now after hearing Professor Stevens’ explanation of the processes involved in matching. This is obviously rather complex. Let us try to make a simple breakdown. There is differentiation first at the transducer level – probably two steps of differentiation enter at this level; then there is differentiation again at the various synaptic levels. Then something most complicated enters: a matching process of cumulative events, a “memory” process. And all this is embraced by a power function which relates the external energy input to the final step of the chain.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ruth E. Bowden, review of *Touch, Heat and Pain*, in *Journal of Anatomy*, vol. 103, part 1 (June 1968), 184.

¹⁷ “Discussion,” in *Touch, Heat and Pain*, 21.

One can hear the poetry enter into the diction of Professor Loewenstein as he muses aloud, “Then something most complicated enters: a matching process of cumulative events, a ‘memory’ process,” as the differentiated levels between synaptic and transducers – that is to say, levels of transfer, passage and communication – encode and embody the qualitative movements called memory whose use cannot avoid the self-aware form taken by communication, namely language.¹⁸ We see this in the poem “Again in the Black Cloud” in an itemized passage:

¹⁸ Might the poem “Thanks for the Memory” (the Rainger and Robin song aside) be in part a response to the query, the problem articulated by Professor Loewenstein?

Thanks for the Memory

An increase in the average quantity
of transmitter (or other activating substance
released from the VRS) arriving
at the postsynaptic side over an extended
period of time (minutes to days) should lead
to an augmentation in the number of receptor sites
and an expansion of the postsynaptic
receptor region, through conversion of receptor
monomers into receptor
polymers and perhaps some increase in
the synthesis of monomers. [None
of these ideas bears upon the
chemical basis for depolarization
induced by acquisition
of transmitter
by receptor.
There is evidence

Wound Response, 9 / 220. Justin Katko of Queens’ College, Cambridge, has informed me that the title of Prynne’s “Thanks for the Memory” is an allusion to Edward M. Kosower, “A Molecular Basis for Learning and Memory,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 69, no. 11 (November 1972), 3292-3296. Mr Katko was also gracious enough to share a copy of this article with me, for which I extend my thanks for the new memory. The opening of Kosower’s article echoes the concerns of *Touch, Heat and Pain* in the terms of that I have argued, namely, the constructive value of obscurity where questions are fundamental: “In spite of considerable

Air to blood

are the two signs, flushed with the sound:

- (a) “tended to refrain from aimless wandering”
- (b) “experienced less dizziness”
- (c) “learned to smile a little”
- (d) “said they felt better and some indeed
seemed happier” (*WR* 20 / 230).

These would be memories – may be even fictions of memories – but with the pronominal shifter suppressed (I, he, she, it, they) they become themselves actions as any hierarchy between transducer, synapse and environment becomes regulatively indistinct. The problem being addressed by Professor Loewenstein is that of the *processes involved in matching*, or, more precisely, the problem of cross-matching modalities. Here, for example, is the opening of S.S. Stevens’ paper, again, the paper from which *Wound Response* takes its epigraph:

Nature has tuned the sense organs to respond to aspects of the enveloping universe in such a way that each modality has a uniqueness not shared by any of the others. Taste is different from touch; warmth is different from smell; light is different from sound. Efforts to understand the operation of the senses have concentrated mainly on their qualitative aspects, and attempts to explain have been framed largely in terms of specific neural pathways. The doctrine of specific nerve energies was Johannes Müller’s contribution to this qualitative endeavour. The sensory systems tell us not only about quality, but also about quantity.¹⁹

effort [...], our understanding of learning and memory is still rather limited.” Edward Kosower, *ibid*, 3292. Noteworthy in this article, is its use of electron micrographs matching the use of the new electron microscopy of *Touch, Heat and Pain* as model for *Wound Response*, that is, the use of magnification to make accessible what would otherwise be beyond the terms of human measurement as one of the principle parameters of Prynne’s developing poetics for which *Wound Response* is the determining form going forward.

¹⁹ S.S. Stevens, “Transfer Functions of the Skin and Muscle Senses,” in *Touch, Heat and Pain*, 3.

Scientific measurement, it is understood, cannot be about uniqueness (“The sensory systems tell us not only about quality”), hence Stevens, whilst acknowledging the import of accounts of the senses which stress the qualitative, chooses to concentrate on the quantitative aspects of sensation for it is there that the kinds of account of measurement valorized can be practiced. Stevens’ own account, however, stresses the uniqueness of each sense in relation to “the enveloping universe,” and it was already known that all living systems develop distinctive memories and memory paths which, through the principle of feedback (then being conceptualized by Cybernetics) foregrounded the autonomy of sub-systems within larger homeostatic balances. The problem for Stevens – articulated by Loewenstein in the ensuing discussion of his paper – will be exactly the problem stemming from the uniqueness of each sense for which a quantitative approach could not in principle be a solution. Indeed, there is a poem by Prynne called “Quality in that Case as Pressure” from the earlier collection *The White Stones* (1969) which precisely addresses Stevens’ problem of quantity by asserting the transformation of quality under certain conditions into quantity:

Presence in this condition is quality
 which can be transformed & is subject
 even to paroxysm – but it is not
lapse: that is the chief point. As I
 move with my weight there is collusion,
 with the sight of how we would rise
 or fall on the level.

When the language of the poem moves to that of one who is

seen to stumble & who falls with joy, unhurt.
 Or who hurries on, on some pavement, the
 sublute crystal locked for each step.
 They aim their faces but also bear them
 and have cloth next to most of their skin²⁰

²⁰ J. H. Prynne, “Quality in that Case as Pressure,” *The White Stones* (Lincoln: Grosseteste Pres, 1969), 50 / *Poems*, 78.

as readers we find ourselves back upon the terrain of *Wound Response*: the transfer functions of the skin and muscles senses (Charles Olson's proprioception in a more materialist conceptuality), the question (and problem) of mechanisms of transfer of energy from one kind and form to another ("the / sublate crystal locked for each step"), the threat of a bruise contre-coup as liminal trigger to an *état secondaire* ("the person who can be / seen to stumble & who falls with joy, unhurt") as presented in "Of Movement toward a Natural Place" which opens on the scene of injury barely coincident with the time of recognition – as though as one falls down the stairs one scarcely has time to think *I am falling* ... "but it is not / lapse" –

See him recall the day by moral trace, a squirt
to cross-fire shewing fear of hurt at top left; the
bruise is glossed by "nothing much" but drains
to deep excitement. His recall is false but the charge
is still there in neural space, pearly blue with a
touch of crimson (WR 12 / 223)

the resulting actions of which will "make sense right at the contre-coup." Similar actions and paroxysms are explored in "Quality in that Case as Pressure" where the suggestion of contre-coup (the "cross-fire shewing fear of hurt at top left") is conveyed in the verses

As I
move with my weight there is collusion

amongst things, objects, processes and qualities, but which I also construe as a tacit rime with *contusion*. It is the collusion amongst things, processes and senses that makes it all but impossible for there to be any quantitative solution to the problem of processes involving matching, that indeed makes all sense processes necessarily modalities of cross-matching. Now, the other and much older word for this phenomenon of cross-matching modalities is synaesthesia – but it is no longer the synaesthesia treated by the older tradition of Symbolist and late-Symbolist thought as found, say, in a Pater or Kandinsky and Schönberg - and it is here that the epigraph to *Wound Response* begins to foreground the poetic problematic which rides upon and through the apparently materialist language of medico-experimental science, and for which neurology will become a privileged field in

Prynne's *oeuvre* and poetics, namely, the problem of equivalent descriptions.

Let us return to the epigraph form *Touch, Heat and Pain*:

“Of particular interest in the present context are the observations made on patients whose middle ear had been opened in such a way that a cotton electrode soaked in the normal saline solution could be placed near the cochlea. A total of 20 surgically operated ears were studied. Eleven patients heard pure tones whose pitch corresponded to the frequency of the sinusoidal voltage applied to the electrode....One patient reported gustatory sensations.”

Touch, Heat and Pain (1966), p.11²¹

With a cotton electrode soaked in normal saline solution placed near the cochlea, “Eleven patients heard pure tones whose pitch corresponded to the frequency of the sinusoidal voltage applied to the electrode,” followed by the poetry’s [not Stevens’] ellipses, and then the flat, very flat report that “One patient reported gustatory sensations.” Just one, and that one patient (the quantitative exception) will be the threshold – the *exergue* – to the poetic experience of *Wound Response* as the synaesthesia of hearing and taste opens onto a liminal world of latency, suspension, reversibilities (in all forms made possible by cross-matching modalities) characterized by de-substantialization as the world of sound becomes a model for movement and apperception and further cross-matching of perception consistent with the hypothesis that every living organ / organism not only develops memory paths unique to it but may as a result develop unforeseen possibilities as a result of the feedback effects of its autonomy. The Central Nervous System is the figure – and fact – of this thinking and possibility, implicitly so in *The White Stones*, fully thematised as *model* in *Wound Response*, and thereafter part of the reflex in this developing *oeuvre* as we can see, for example, in *The Oval Window* where we find an opening verse that says, “It is a CNS depressant. Endless sorrow / rises from the misty waves.” (*The Oval Window*, 31 / 336) Consider, then, in this light, the poem which

²¹ Epigraph to J.H. Prynne, *Wound Response* (Cambridge: Street Editions, 1974), 3, *Poems*, 215. All subsequent references to *Wound Response* will be in text as *WR* followed by page number and page number to *Poems*.

follows the blank page following the epigraph to the collection, the poem “Treatment in the Field.” The blank page between epigraph and poem is crucial, for the turning of the page onto left blank field (3-4) with the eyes moving from left to right (4-5) enacts measurement of absence and symptomatology, something to which we shall return below. Following the epigraph, following the blank page, “Treatment in the Field.”

III

TREATMENT IN THE FIELD

Through the window the sky clears
and in sedate attachment stands the order of battle,
quiet as a colour chart and bathed
by threads of hyaline and gold leaf.
The brietal perfusion makes a controlled
amazement and trustingly we walk there, speak
fluently on the same level of sound;
white murmur ferries the clauses to the true
centre of the sleep forum. The river
glints in harmony, by tribute from the darker
folds of that guttural landscape which
lie drawn up under our touch. Blue-green to yellow
in memory beyond the gold number: the
tones and sweetness confuse in saline.

We burn by that echo. It is called love like a wren hunt,
crimson ice, basal narcosis. By deep perjury
it is the descent of man. Above him
the dicots flourish their pattern of indefinite growth,
as under cloud now the silent ones “are loath to change
their way of life.” The stress lines con-
verge in finite resonance: is this the orchestral
momentum of the seed coat? Our trust selects
the ice cap of the General Staff, rod to
baton to radon seed (snowy hypomania)—thus he

jabs a hysteric wound, H₂O₂ at top strength.

Yet in the tent of holy consternation there are shadows
 for each column of fire; in the hedgerow the wren
 flits cross-wise from branch to branch. Afferent
 signal makes cantilena of speech
 as from the far round of the child-way.
 We are bleached in sound as it burns by what
 we desire; light darting
 over and over, through a clear sky.²²

“Treatment in the Field” is the opening frame in a form of narrative in a multiply-causal, non-intentional universe the closing of frame of which will be “Again in the Black Cloud.” “Treatment in the Field” is a poem which pivots upon multiple thresholds and agencies and urgencies simultaneously neurological, medical, philosophical and poetic. The preoccupations of *Wound Response* – and subsequently in the developed *oeuvre* of its author - are fully announced in this poem. From the trauma figured in the title “Treatment in the *Field*” – which term, *field*, is especially rich in English poetic language²³ – to the question of threshold (“the window”) and the related question of the position (or *place*) from which a subject may be a witness to events unfolding with it or through it, or even, in spite of it, the subject, that is, as a momentary articulation of consciousness in a larger field, where

in sedate attachment stands the order of battle,
 quiet as a colour chart and bathed
 by threads of hyaline and gold leaf.

The window through which the perception (or apperception) of the clearing sky is announced begins the collapsing of the distinct orders of sensory noemata as the quiet condition announced through the contrastive imagery – “in sedate attachment stands the *order of battle*” –

²² J.H. Prynne, “Treatment in the Field,” *Wound Response*, 5 / 216.

²³ On the etymological, metaphorical and theological richness of the word *field* in its Germanic registers, cf. J.H. Prynne, “A Pedantic Note in Two Parts,” *The English Intelligencer*, 2nd Series, (June 1967), 346-341.

is deepened, by a local, powerful barbiturate as intravenous anesthetic prior to a larger, more general anesthetic:

The brietal perfusion makes a controlled
amazement and trustingly we walk there, speak
fluently on the same level of sound;

at which moment the transition through another order of sensory experience is made: the level of sound. Landscape (announced by “the descent of man,” that is, katabasis, as “Above him / the dicots flourish their pattern of indefinite growth”) will become expressively acoustic – “that guttural landscape” – and simultaneously haptic and chromatic:

the darker
folds of that guttural landscape which
lie drawn up under our touch

as the synaesthesia encompasses and confounds, *confuses* all spheres (interior/exterior) as well as modes (seeing, hearing) and capacity (memory):

Blue-green to yellow
in memory beyond the gold number: the
tones and sweetness confuse in saline.

In “Treatment in the Field” sound is the medium *par excellence* of the fluidization, purification and cross-matching of ontological categories. There is the sound of “a hysteric wound”; the “white murmur” that ferries language (“the clauses”) “to the true / centre of the sleep forum,” that is, to the hypnoid condition which in “Of Movement Towards a Natural Place” will be linked to the “white flakes” as symptom of an underlying “white rate” of histological (wound) acceleration:

upon his lips curious white flakes, like thin snow.
He sees his left wrist rise to tell him the time,
to set damage control at the same white rate.

(WR 12 / 223.)

By the time of the last poem of *Wound Response*, that is, “Again in the Black Cloud,” the white murmur of ferrying at the white rate of damage control – for, as it is said in “Again in the Black Cloud,” “Damage makes perfect”) – will become metonymically presented as “the white bees”:

Falling loose with a grateful hold
of the sounds towards purple, the white bees
swarm out from the open voice gap. Such “treasure” [...].

From beginning to end in *Wound Response*, the role of sound and acoustic imagery (“We burn by that echo”) is presented in relation to pharmacology inducing a secondary state, for just as “The brieal perfusion” points to a powerful but local anesthetic, likewise does *basal narcosis* point to a narcosis (etymologically a benumbing) induced by sedatives in a surgical patient prior to a general anesthetic, or more generally, any drug-induced form of unconsciousness:

We burn by that echo. It is called love like a wren hunt,
crimson ice, basal narcosis.

In the condition comparable to the *state* of basal narcosis the patient is not responsive to verbal stimuli – from the position of an observer such as a medical professional - but remains responsive to noxious stimuli. The echo here figures an acoustic doubling. In such a condition the patient is a riot of cross-matching sensory overload and implosion (a “tent of holy consternation,” shot through with pain, that is, “each column of fire,” which is indistinguishably both pain and fire) and language as itself an acoustic and material quilt of cross-matching movements (the wren that “flits cross-wise from branch to branch” figuring this sensation of language as affect which also is the movement – “branch to branch” - of afferent pathways: “Afferent / signal makes the cantilena of speech,” that is, a primal, *ur-song* communicated through “the far round of the child-way”) whose enveloping actions lead to the *neural* state (a mark and form of temporal and topographical regression) in which,

We are bleached in sound as it burns by what
we desire; light darting
over and over, through a clear sky.

There is here complete regulative indistinction between affect and thought, inside and outside as “sound burns by what / we desire.” The poem begins “Through the window the sky clears” and closes with “light darting / over and over, through a clear sky.” What has taken place, or, what has receded in order that the sky – or a saline *solution* become acoustic - should become *clear* as though the sky is an effect, a *property* of clarity and acoustic projection?²⁴ Here is the closing stanza uninterrupted in all its rich, chromatic, pain-filled synaesthesia:

Yet in the tent of holy consternation there are shadows
for each column of fire; in the hedgerow the wren
flits cross-wise from branch to branch. Afferent
signal makes cantilena of speech
as from the far round of the child-way.
We are bleached in sound as it burns by what
we desire; light darting
over and over, through a clear sky.

The conclusion to “Treatment in the Field” is, as it were, for the non-subject centered actions to be re-situated, in a powerful rendition of passivity, “Again in the Black Cloud.” The poems, then, are acoustic pendants.

IV

intention, ad. L. *intention-em* stretching, straining, effort, attention, application, design, purpose, etc., n. of action from *intendere* to intend.

²⁴ Here we might recall the P.F. Strawson’s important reflections on the metaphysical conditions of auditory spatiality and the problem of satisfying the conditions of a non-solipsistic consciousness. Cf. P.F. Strawson, “Sounds,” *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, 1964), 59-86. I have elsewhere used Strawson’s thinking to explore the role of blue and the figuring of sound in the dream-work canvasses of the Surrealist painter Joan Miró, cf. Michael Stone-Richards, “A Painting of Suspended Feeling,” *Place and Liminality: Studies in Surrealist Art* (forthcoming).

first intention, the healing of a lesion or fracture by the immediate re-union of the severed parts, without granulation;

second intention, the healing of a wound by granulation after suppuration.

Oxford English Dictionary

Do not think that because I call it a ‘darkness’ or a ‘cloud’ it is the sort of cloud you see in the sky [...].

*The Cloud of Unknowing*²⁵

AGAIN IN THE BLACK CLOUD

Shouts rise again from the water
surface and flecks of cloud skim over
to storm-light, going up the stem.

Falling loose with a grateful hold
of the sounds towards purple, the white bees
swarm out from the open voice gap. Such “treasure”:

the cells of the child line run back
through hope to the cause of it; the hour
is crazed by fracture. Who can see what he loves,
again or before, as the injury shears
past the curve of recall, the field
double-valued at the divine point.

Air to blood

are the two signs, flushed with the sound:

- (a) “tended to refrain from aimless wandering”
- (b) “experienced less dizziness”
- (c) “learned to smile a little”
- (d) “said they felt better and some indeed

seemed happier” –out in the
snow-fields the aimless beasts
mean what they do, so completely the shout
is dichroic in gratitude,
half-silvered, the

²⁵ *The Cloud of Unknowing and other Works*, trans. Clifton Wolters (Harmondsworth, 1961, 1978), 66.

gain control set for “rescue” at
negative echo line. The clouds now “no longer
giving light but full of it,” the entry condition a daze
tending to mark zero. Shouting and
laughing and intense felicity given over, rises
under the hill as *tinnitus aurium*, hears the
child her blue
coat! his new
shoes and boat!

Round and round there is descent through
the leader stroke, flashes of light over slopes, fear
grips the optic muscle. Damage makes perfect:
“reduced cerebral blood flow and oxygen utilisation
are manifested by an increase in slow frequency waves,
a decrease in alpha-wave activity, an increase in
beta-waves, the appearance of paroxysmal potentials.”

And constantly the
child line dips into sleep, the
more than countably infinite hierarchy of
higher degree causality conditions
setting the reverse signs of memory and dream.
“Totally confused most of the time” –is
the spending of gain
or damage mended
and ended, aged, the
shouts in the rain: in
to the way out

Run at 45° to the light cones, this cross-
matching of impaired attention
feels wet streaking down the tree bark,
a pure joy at a feeble joke.²⁶

The poem opens upon an expansive field of sound:

Shouts rise again from the water
surface

²⁶ J.H. Prynne, “Again in the Black Cloud,” *Wound Response*, 20-21 / 230-231.

in such a way that the problematic of cross-matching modalities – synaesthesia – is immediately announced in a manner at once phenomenological, prosodic and expressive as pivoting upon the semantic and tonic possibilities effected by the opening line break at “water / surface” readily permitting of: “the water surface” (substantive), “surface (verb) and flecks of cloud...,” underlying which is a direction of rhythm taking up all possibilities in its wake. Here we have the problematic at the outset: transformation and process, that is, the problematic of agency, change and movement. What *surface*? What is the status of *surface* and *shouts*? If surface may at first be construed as a noun it points not to a place but an expanse; but when, through the line break, it is construable as a verb, the sudden dynamism thereby glimpsed makes of the expanse, in relation to the stanzaic shaping, a dynamism of twisting, helix motion, transforming the expanse into a momentary membrane. We may, though, locate the concern with transformation and process more precisely as relative to measurement and measure by the presence of ‘flecks of cloud’ and *the black cloud* of the title:

Shouts rise again from the water
surface and flecks of cloud skim over
to storm-light, going up the stem

where the bare incidence of point of contact figured by *flecks* and the *moment* of surface suggests both speed, transience and evanescence in place and dimension. As so often with such poetry the abundance of iconographic and typological possibilities is the source of richness, ambiguity and a threatened semantic inertia, even as there is a certain swiftness, or lightness in the rhythm and directedness of the poem’s reading voice. Consider, for example, that measure, as humanly significant distance and proximity, is often conveyed through cloud imagery as conveyed in many a passage from the Hebrew Bible (in the diction of the King James Bible), especially the *Psalms*, where, for example, in Psalm XXXVI, we find it said that “Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds” (Ps XXXVI, v. 5), where, too, the prevailing sense is not only of the reach of God’s benevolence and bounty (the God “Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains,” Ps CXXXXVII, v. 8)

but His being beyond human measure at the same time that His measureless sense of measure returns to humans their *just deserts*, that is, judgment, whence Job:

Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his years be searched out.

For he maketh small the drops of water: they pour down rain according to the vapour thereof:

Which the clouds do drop and distil upon man abundantly.

Also can any understand the spreadings of the clouds or the noise of his tabernacle?

Behold, he spreadeth his light upon it, and covereth the bottom of the sea.

For by them judgeth he the people; he giveth meat in abundance.

With clouds he covereth the light; and commandeth it not to shine by the cloud that cometh betwixt.

(*The Book of Job*, chapter 36, vv. 26-32)

This language of measure, abundance and judgment is not archaicism, as it is still operative in the poetic thought of Hölderlin and, not unrelated, the English Romantics such as Wordsworth and Shelley, where it is either the sense of abundance, of gift (the unforeseen, the undeserved, the unasked for), that is operative, or the sense of the aleatoric movement of the cloud as figure of the movement of thought, but never the sense of judgment. Always, the deployment of cloud imagery – and we shall speak here of cloud imagery as though the conception of clouds is at least relatively stable²⁷ – is intimately related to the issue of humanly significant measure even when it is the unboundedness of God or the cosmos that is at issue. So, in the famous reflections of John Ruskin, for example, titled “Of Cloud Beauty” from his *Modern Painters*, we find in the opening that “Between earth and man arose the leaf. Between the heaven and man came the cloud. His life being partly as the

²⁷ Cf. Walter Benjamin, “Franz Kafka,” *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 133; and cf. Ulrich Baer, “The Experience of Freedom,” *Remnants of Song: Trauma and the Experience of Modernity in Charles Baudelaire and Paul Celan* (Stanford: University of Stanford Press, 2000), 52.

falling leaf, and partly as the flying vapor,” before asking, simply: “Has the reader any distinct idea of what clouds are?”²⁸ In one sense Ruskin simply re-phrases the old idea of man as mid-way between the beasts and angels, but in another sense, as witnessed by his extraordinary descriptive phenomenology of cloud formations, he was more concerned with man’s placement within the modern (that is, industrial) condition even as, in his chapter on “The Angel of the Sea,” he would quote Job (following the Vulgate) and return to the configuration between cloud and judgment:

For these are the robes of love of the Angel of the Sea. To these that name is chiefly given, the “spreadings of the clouds,” from their extent, their gentleness, their fullness of rain. Note how they are spoken of in Job xxxvi. V. 29-31. “By them judgeth he the people; he giveth meat in abundance. With clouds he covereth the light. He hath hidden the light in his hands, and commanded that it should return. He speaks of it to his friend; that it is his possession, and that he may ascend thereto.

That, then, is the Sea Angel’s message to God’s friends; *that*, the meaning of those strange golden lights and purple flashes before the morning rain. The rain is sent to judge, and feed us; but the light is the possession of the friends of God, and they may ascend thereto [...].²⁹

Judgment is not the primary term, but measure, and after Ruskin’s extraordinary reflections on the formation and symbolism of clouds, it will no longer be possible to present the explicit relationship between cloud and judgment, but judgment – our just deserts – will not be evacuated, rather it will be made subject to a new poetics of dissemblance and complex mirroring in relation to threshold experiences, of ten mediated acoustically.

Of the poets important in the formation of Prynne’s poetics and sensibility, from Wordsworth to Stevens, the imagery and language of clouds is part of the reflexes in the established manner of presentation. In order to present our concerns on dissemblance and

²⁸ John Ruskin, “Of Cloud Beauty,” *Modern Painters*, Book V (Boston: Aldine Book Publishing Co., c. 1886), 140.

²⁹ John Ruskin, “The Angel of the Sea,” *Modern Painters*, Book V, 183.

mirroring, there are two poets, Charles Baudelaire and Georg Trakl,³⁰ whose rendition of a thinking of cloud imagery will be determinant for the poetic thought of Prynne. For Trakl, the cloud is an image – and medium – of transformation of *aisthesis* and consciousness: it *affects* what it covers, transforms it,³¹ but there is rarely ever question that the cloud is anything but an image of interior movement: its stillness, its silences, its ability to freeze or capture light (“Winterdämmerung”³²), to be a mark of the freezing or slowing of time, to be a mark of darkness or shadow (“Abendlied”³³), the abstractive absorption of color, in a landscape stripped, denuded of all but the forms of affects become autonomous powers in a late Symbolist theatre of the interior voice.³⁴ The cloud can be purple (*purpurner Wolke*), or golden, or red, just as the sun can be purple, or dreams can be purple; the cloud can be aglow with light and time (“Musik im Mirabel”³⁵) or broken, transpierced by light (“Menscheit”³⁶), or the accompaniment on a walk, that is, figure for the movement of thought in a mirrored medium (“Die Wolke wandert überm Weiherspiegel / The cloud wanders over the mirror surface of a fishpond”³⁷). The diction of Trakl will be determinant in local gestures in certain of Prynne’s work from *The White Stones* (“Finely, brush the/ sound from your / eyes”³⁸) to concentrated form in such work as *Into the Day* and *The Oval Window*, where, for example, the following landscape scene is made possible by, and in dialogue – and walking – with, the language of Trakl:

³⁰ On the aesthetics of mirroring in Trakl, cf. Eric B. Williams, *The Mirror and the Word: Modernism, Literary Theory, and Georg Trakl* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993).

³¹ Cf. Francis Michael Sharp, “Poetic Figures of Altered Consciousness,” *The Poet’s Madness: A Reading of Georg Trakl* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 110-136.

³² Georg Trakl, “Winterdämmerung,” *Dichtungen und Briefe*, volume 1, eds., Walther Killy and Hans Szklener (Salzburg: Otto Muller, 1969), 20.

³³ Georg Trakl, “Abendlied,” *Dichtungen und Briefe*, vol. 1, 65.

³⁴ Cf. Jeremy Prynne, “‘Modernism’ in German Poetry,” *The Cambridge Review*, (March 1963), 331-337.

³⁵ Georg Trakl, “Musik im Mirabel,” *Dichtungen und Briefe*, volume 1, 18.

³⁶ Georg Trakl, “Menscheit,” *Dichtungen und Briefe*, volume 1, 43.

³⁷ Georg Trakl, “Der Herbst des Einsamen,” *Dichtungen und Briefe*, vol. 1, 109.

³⁸ J.H. Prynne, “On the Anvil,” *The White Stones*, 15 / 42. This poem could be compared with the use of sounds in the lunar eyes in Trakl’s “An den Knaben Elis,” *Dichtungen und Briefe*, vol. 1, 26.

The clouds are white in a pale autumn sky.
Looking at the misty paths I see this stooping
figure seeming to falter, in a thick compound
of adjustments, sublimed in white flakes. Then
it clears down, she turns or round her
the sweet breath goes about, at midnight
murmuring. Extremities flexed and cold.
A light wind crosses the fragrant waters;
deaf to reason I cup my hands, to
dew-drenched apricot flowers and their
livid tranquility. It has the merit
of being seen to hurt, in her dream,
and then much further on, it does.

The Oval window, 29 / 334

Likewise the moments of delicate dream diction in *The Oval Window* evoke that of Trakl:

the stars are snowing, do you see it there:
bright moonlight whitens the pear blossom.
You listen by the oval window, as
calm waves flow onward to the horizon.

The Oval Window, 25 / 330

Of especial import is the manner in which in Trakl, for example, in a poem such as "An den Knaben Elis," there is characteristically a moment or incident which signals a passage or transition in the nature, kind and dimension of experience at hand:

Elis, wenn die Amsel im schwarzen Wald ruft,
Dieses ist dein Untergang.

[...]

Laß, wenn deine Stirne leise blutet
Uralte Legenden
Und dunkle Deutung des Vogelflugs.

Du aber gehst mit weichen Schritten in die Nacht,

Die voll purpurner Trauben hangt,
Und du regst die Arme schöner im Blau.

(Elis, when the blackbird in the black forest calls
This is your descent. [...])

Endure,³⁹ when your forehead quietly bleeds
Ancient legends
And the dark meaning of bird-flight.

But you, with soft steps walk into the night
Laden with purple grapes
And more beautiful is the movement of your arm in the
blue.)⁴⁰

One can hear in these passages from Trakl the blood which “fails the ear, trips the bird’s / fear of bright blue” which opens *Into the Day*, and which, too, abruptly marks the moment of transformation to experience as passage and transition; likewise can one read the wound – that is, the dark augur – on the forehead at contre-coup in “Of Movement Towards a Natural Place,” where “the / bruise is glossed by ‘nothing much’ but drains to deep excitement.” (*WR* 12 / 223.)

Arguably the most dramatic, enigmatic – and modern – performance of this thinking of the iconology of clouds is Baudelaire’s “L’Étranger” (The Stranger), the opening prose-poem to the *Petits poèmes en prose (Le Spleen de Paris)*, posthumously published in 1869.

L’Étranger

- Qui aimes-tu le mieux, homme énigmatique, dis? ton père, ta mère, ta soeur ou ton frère?
- Je n’ai pas ni père, ni mère, ni soeur, ni frère.
- Tes amis?
- Vous vous servez là d’une parole dont le sens m’est resté jusqu’à ce jour inconnue.

³⁹ This rendering of *lafs* as *endure* is adopted from Francis Michael Sharp’s reading in *The Poet’s Madness*, 114-117.

⁴⁰ Georg Trakl, “An den Knaben Elis,” *Dichtungen und Briefe*, vol. 1, 26.

- Ta patrie?
- J'ignore sous quelle latitude elle est située.
- La beauté?
- Je l'aimerais volontiers, déesse et immortelle.
- L'or?
- Je le haïs comme vous haïssez Dieu.
- Eh! qu'aimes-tu donc, extraordinaire étranger?
- J'aime les nuages... les nuages qui passent... là-bas... là-bas... les merveilleux nuages!⁴¹

- Whom best do you love, enigmatic man, say? your father, your mother, your sister or your brother?
- I have neither father, nor mother, nor sister, nor brother.
- Your friends?
- There you avail yourself of a word the sense of which to this very day escapes me.
- Your country?
- I am unaware of the latitude under which it is situated.
- Beauty?
- I would willingly love it, goddess and immortal.
- Gold?
- I hate it as you hate God.
- Well! what, then, do you love, extraordinary stranger?
- I love the clouds ... the clouds which pass ... over there ... over there ... the marvelous clouds!

It is not my wish here to develop an exegesis of this radically simple poetic work, but, rather, to present it as part of the poetic configuration actively at work in the formation of the distinctive deployment of cloud thought in *Wound Response* and the *oeuvre* of Prynne, and so I shall be direct. The first matter announced in “L’Étranger,” and developed throughout *Petits poèmes en prose*, is that of

⁴¹ Charles Baudelaire, “L’Étranger,” *Petits poèmes en prose (Le Spleen de Paris)*, ed., Robert Kopp (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 23. All subsequent citations from this work will be in text as PPP followed by page number.

love: what is it? How is it constituted, which is, by what relations bounded, connected or sustained? The second matter announced in this prose poem and treated of throughout the collection – especially in relation to the problem of time and boredom, one sense of the originally English word *spleen* – is that of resemblance, or rather, lack of resemblance: for example in “Le miroir” (PPP 121) where a man looking at himself in a mirror is questioned as to why he bothers, and where, too, it is not at all obvious from where the question is posed, from outside or from within an imagined speech of self-affection; in “L’Invitation au voyage” (PPP 61-64) the problem of resemblance is explicitly raised in the identification between self and place (“There is a region [contrée] which resembles you,” PPP 61), self and property (“this canvas which resembles you,” PPP 63, “These treasures, these furnishings [etc.], they’re you,” PPP 63), self and thought (“those are my thoughts which sleep or roll on your breast. Gently you lead them towards the *sea* which is infinity, all the while *reflecting* the depths of the sky in the limpidity of your beautiful soul,” PPP 63-64, my emphases); the problem of the temporality of boredom, for Baudelaire the affection most destructive of (psychic) relations and hence stable resemblance, is most dramatically treated – and rendered – through the murderousness of a Prince who feared nothing ... save *l’ennui* in “Une mort héroïque” (PPP 89-94). That the temporality of boredom is of especial moment to Baudelaire is clear from the *opening* poem “Au lecteur” in *Les Fleurs du Mal* which speaks of all the vices and corruption of man but of which there is one, just one, more feared by “Vous, hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère,” than any other, namely, boredom, which verse, of course, is the concluding verse of “The Burial of the Dead,” the *opening* division of Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. If, for Baudelaire, boredom is that which most dangerously and effectively attacks the energy of connectivity, the logic of relations, then the clouds (*les nuages qui passent...*), in their ease, their effortlessness – can boredom be considered a form of energy? – become the emblematic double, the enigmatic sign of the disaggregation of relations at every ontological level of categoriality, and thereby the undoing of measure as opening onto the purely enigmatic, whence the radical simplicity of “L’Étranger.” It is the attack upon the energies of connectivity and relations which established the radicality of the prose poems of Baudelaire – a key model for Trakl – and their modernity, in making for a style of reading, or rather, style of attention, no longer merely thematic but figural, which works to defeat interpretation as content, but which

necessitates the invitation to interpretation from the outset. It matters little whether the undoing of relations be that of the psychological or, even, the cosmological, whence, in Prynne's elegy to Paul Celan, "Es Lebe Der König," this notion of measure is conveyed through its cognate relation measurement:

Fire and honey oozes from cracks in the earth;
the cloud eases up the Richter scale⁴²

where the implied undoing of measure in the disaster at the planetary level avails itself of Celan's version of the purely enigmatic,

Ihre – "ein
Rätsel ist Rein-
entsprungenes" –, ihre
Erinnerung an
schwimmende Hölderlinturme, mowent-
umschwirt.⁴³

Their – "an enigma is
the purely
originated" –, their
memory of
Hölderlin towers afloat, circled
by whirring gulls⁴⁴

which itself avails itself of the energies released in Hölderlin's rendition of the undoing of measure, when to the question, posed by "In lieblicher Bläue...": "Giebt es auf Erden ein Mass?" the answer comes simply, "Es giebt keines. Nemlich est hemmen den Donnergang nie die Welten des Schöpfers."⁴⁵ (Is there a measure on earth? There is none. For never the Creator's worlds constrict the

⁴² J.H. Prynne, "Es Lebe der König," *Brass* (London: Ferry Press, 1971), 31 / *Poems*, 169.

⁴³ Paul Celan, "Tübingen, Jänner," *Die Niemandrose* (1963) in *Gedichte*, vol. I (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), 226.

⁴⁴ Paul Celan, "Tübingen, January," *Poems*, trans. Michael Hamburger (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1980), 145.

⁴⁵ Friedrich Hölderlin, "In lieblicher Bläue...," *Samtliche Werke*, vol. 2: *Gedichte Nach 1800*, ed., Friedrich Beissner (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1953), 372.

progress of thunder.) Characteristic of the thought at work in this poetics is the unworking of image, relation and measure: where “Es Lebe der König” says that the

Sky divides
as the flag once more become technical, the print
divides also; starlight becomes negative,⁴⁶

“In lieblicher Bläue...” posits the scene of a man looking into a mirror seeing his picture (Bild) “es gleicht dem Manne” (it resembles the man), which image / picture will then be compared to Oedipus and his “indescribable, unspeakable, inexpressible” sufferings making thereby the self-likeness self-torn whilst remaining in place, like a mask.⁴⁷

To this particular form of legibility of cloud iconography and thought we are also given a form of experience through *colour*.⁴⁸

Falling loose with a grateful hold
of the sounds toward purple, the white bees
swarm out of the open voice gap. Such “treasure”;

and later,

dichroic in gratitude,
half-silvered
[...]
The clouds now “no longer
giving light but full of it.”

The complex temporality inaugurated by the line break water / surface becomes definitively anachronised as time is maddened by fractures (“the hour / is crazed by fracture”) and so self-divisive, whilst the question of love is articulated explicitly for the first time in relation to vision, painful affection and possibly irreversible loss (of memory, identity, of continuation represented by “the child line”) in a

⁴⁶ J.H. Prynne, “Es Lebe der König.” *Brass*, 31 / *Poems*, 169.

⁴⁷ Friedrich Hölderlin, “In lieblicher Bläue ... ,” *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 2, ed., Friedrich Beissner (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1953), 372.

⁴⁸ Cf. Ruskin who writes that “colour is the type of love,” *Modern Painters*, volume V, 403.

field of highly delimited but differing forces (“the field / double-valued”):

Falling loose with a grateful hold
of the sounds towards purple, the white bees
swarm out from the open voice gap. Such “treasure”:
the cells of the child line run back
through hope to the cause of it; the hour
is crazed by fracture. Who can see what he loves,
again or before, as the injury shears
past the curve of recall, the field
double-valued at the divine point.

The field that actualizes the range of painful affection is double-valued in all instances: color-clouds, sound-color, duration-discontinuity, hope-loss, black cloud-full of light, etc. The distinctiveness of the role and thinking of color in *Wound Response* and “Again in the Black Cloud” derives in large part from the way that color, as part of the problem of cross-matching modalities, is worked to mark liminal experience as the means of accession to and manifestation of an autonomous structuring activity. The use of color predicates has a long literary history (cf. *Revelations*) and is especially characteristic of the representation of intensity of expression in Romantic poetry (witness Coleridge’s “Christmas out of Doors”) but only becomes of *literary* value when it becomes part of / or pays attention to the verbal fabric of the given work. Thus consider aspects of Coleridge’s “Christmas out of Doors” and its conviction

that there are sounds more sublime than any sight can be,
more absolutely *suspending the power of comparison*, and more
utterly absorbing the mind’s self-consciousness in its total
attention to the object working upon it,⁴⁹

or the following passage from Büchner’s *Lenz* to which we shall return below:

⁴⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Christmas out of Doors,” *The Friend: A Series of Essays*, vol. II (London: Rest Fenner, 1818), 323-324. My emphasis.

Only once or twice, when the storm forced the clouds down into the valleys and the mist rose from below, and voices echoed from the rocks, sometimes like distant thunder, sometimes in a mighty rush like wild songs in celebration of the earth; or when the clouds reared up like wildly whinnying horses and the sun's rays shone through, drawing their glittering sword across the snowy slopes, so that a blinding light sliced downward from the peak to the valley; or when the stormwind blew the clouds down and away, tearing into them a pale blue lake of sky, until the wind abated and a humming sound like a lullaby or the ringing of bells floated upwards from the gorges far below, and from the tops of the fir trees, and a gentle red crept across the blue, and tiny clouds drifted pass on silver wings, and all the peaks shone and glistened sharp and clear across the landscape; at such moments he felt a tugging in his breast and stood panting, his body leant forward, eyes and mouth torn open; he felt as though he would have to suck up the storm and receive it within him. He would stretch himself flat on the ground, communing with nature with a joyfulness that caused *pain*⁵⁰

and it is clear, not only that we are dealing in part with a comparable imagery in “Again in the Black Cloud” emblematic of intense experience at a subliminal level, but that the symbolism points to and registers an *autonomously structured activity* the form of which is metonymically conveyed by “storm-light, going up in the stem” (*WR* 20 / 230), or “light darting / over and over, through a clear sky” (*WR* 5 / 216). This, though important, is not sufficient to do the work which is necessary to secure what is distinctive to the procedures of this poem as articulating an autonomous structuration, for the domain of experience circumscribed by such color predicates is nothing as simple as an “overwhelming poetic experience”- thought that is assuredly at play – but, in a manner characteristic of this poetry and poetics, something both more precise yet larger in scope, namely, the representation of the experience of *electrical charges across*

⁵⁰ Georg Büchner, *Lenz (A Novella)*, (1835), trans. by Michael Patterson in Georg Büchner, *The Complete Plays* (London: Methuen, 1987), 249-250. My emphasis.

the synapses during an experience of regression consequent upon extreme, intense, damage; a physical damage *local yet systemic* in implication [in analogy with language]: may be a heart attack from the subjective experience of a heart attack (what would be characterized by neurology as the movement of a rigid temporality), and/or may be an epileptic fit (the movement of a free temporality, that is, of the brain or consciousness) at the precise point – *place* defined as the dimension which permits the imbrication of differing temporalities in the same function⁵¹ – where the electrical charting of the body does not readily permit a distinguishing of one set of symptomologies from another – thus the *literary* language of subliminal experience becomes a condition of legibility through which (as it were) *another language*, another articulated *expressivity*, manifests itself: the moving forms of threshold / liminal experience as modified, adapted to scientific discourse, a discourse in which both the status of *objectness* is at issue no less than the language and position of observation and actions of autonomous structuration.

The action of the poem, the mode of embodying autonomous structurations, its deployment of multiple expressive and technical languages and forms for action, can be appreciated in a number of ways at once poetic and technical. Consider, for example, the action and significance of what I shall characterize as stanzaic shaping, that is, the shape of the patterns of stanzas on the page and the question of whether and how they might be read aloud. Prynne has long been on record – in teaching and more recently in publication⁵² – as skeptical of the desirability of reading poetry aloud, and this from one with an exceptional ear and sensitivity to quantitative syllabic articulation in his diction. There are certain poems which it is difficult to know how to read aloud (Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés*), or which may not be intended to be heard aloud (Pound's "The Return"), like a soliloquy where the stage convention requires that the actor speaks in order for the interior thoughts of the character to be heard by the audience. This convention, though, is but a fiction of which lyric poetry has no need, and so the epistemology of lyric attention can legitimately pose the question of whether certain poems or types of poems ought – or can, indeed – be *meaningfully* read aloud, a form of thinking that

⁵¹ Cf. Jacques Nassif, *Freud, l'inconscient* (Paris: Galilée, 1977), 128.

⁵² Cf. J.H. Prynne, "Mental Ears and Poetic Work," *Chicago Review*, vol. 55, no.1 (Winter 2010), 126-157.

cannot but have ontological implications about what a poem is and the experience of what is constituted through the compact of reader and poem. This problem of the ontology of readerly acoustics is presented from the opening line break of *water / surface* in “Again in the Black Cloud”

Shouts rise again from the water
surface and flecks of cloud skim over
to storm-light, going up the stem

as any articulate and musically sensitive reader would try to embody and convey the phonic difference between substantive and verb for *water* and both simultaneously, or try to capture as vocal inflections, marks of pitch or timbre, the slight and varying indentations of each verse line. This would suggest, too, that the visual scansion, the typographic disposition of the poem on the page, is meaningful in terms of the possible rendition of the voice, as though the visual scansion is a form of primitive score for the reader. (That few poets themselves enact the implied visual scansion of their own poems is another piece of evidence that may be further adduced in the Prynne argument against the reading aloud of certain kinds of poetry. A case in point, just to stay with the readily accessible, would be William Carlos Williams’ own performance of “The Descent.”⁵³) The stanzaic

⁵³ Cf. *William Carlos Williams Reading*, Caedmon Records, TC 1047, 1954. In his lecture courses in the University of Cambridge, for example, the lecture series *Poetry and Language*, Prynne suggests aids to the training of the attentive ear, one example of which is that one should be able to listen to the reading of a poem and be able to re-construct its layout on the page. This important discipline, however, not only depends upon the listener’s familiarity with prosodic conventions, it depends even more upon the skill of the reader of the poem, and a willingness by the reader to accept that the poem on the page is a form of score. The prevalent manner of reading poetry then – the flat, uninflected manner, the polar opposite of, say, a Yeats or a Valéry or an Akhmatova - does not allow the auditor to hear the poem as an act the notation for which is inferable back to the page. In such cases, the poem is written to be read on the page, but without an explicit acknowledgment of this fact and its implications. The dullness and sameness of most poetry readings attests to this fact. In this vein of argumentation, then, poetry readings are not about poetry, do not indeed function for poetry but as social gatherings, and it is this which is eschewed in Prynne’s reluctance to read in public. The reader should be left to her freedom with the poem itself.

shaping of the poems in *Wound Response*, and *a fortiori* “Again in the Black Cloud,” is not, however, arbitrary. Compare the typographic disposition of “Again in the Black Cloud” to that found in “Of Movement Towards a Natural Place”:

OF MOVEMENT TOWARDS A NATURAL PLACE

See him recall the day by moral trace, a squint
to cross-fire shewing fear of hurt at top left; the
bruise is glossed by “nothing much” but drains
to deep excitement. His recall is false but the charge
is still there in neural space, pearly blue with a
touch of crimson. “By this I mean a distribution
of neurons...some topologically preserved transform”,
upon his lips curious white flakes, like thin snow.
He sees his left wrist rise to tell him the time,
to set the damage control at the same white rate.

What mean square error.⁵⁴ Remorse is a pathology of
syntax, the expanded time-display depletes the
input of “blame” which patters like scar tissue.
First intentions are cleanest: no paint on the nail
cancels the flux link. Then the sun comes out
(top right) and local numbness starts to spread, still
he is “excited” because in part shadow. *Not will
but chance*⁵⁵ the plants claim but tremble, “a
detecting mechanism must integrate across that
population”; it makes sense right at the contre-coup.

⁵⁴ “What mean square error.” Rarely can a term of art from the field of statistical research have been made to seem so longingly beautiful. In statistical and medical research there is a practice called the *chi squared test*. Whenever an experiment is conducted on a sample (or population) there is an expected result (a) followed by the actual experimental result (b), the mean square error is the attempt to quantify the difference between expectation and result for which the formula is: $\Sigma (a-b)^2$.

⁵⁵ “*Not will / but chance*,” that is, the problem of determinism which randomness at the quantum level does not resolve, so “Of Movement Towards a Natural Place” explores the determinism of an event and the freedom to follow the event as a second-order activity in a temporality barely coincident with the event, freedom, that is, as the ability to understand.

So the trace was moral on both sides, as formerly
the moment of godly suffusion: *anima tota in singulis*
membris sui corporis.⁵⁶ The warmth of cognition not

⁵⁶ This passage is from St. Anselm of Canterbury's (1033-1109) *Proslogion, or, Discourse on the Existence of God* (chapter XIII, "How He alone is limitless and eternal, although other spirits are also limitless and eternal"). It may be given as: "all the soul in each part / or member of his body." In chapter XIII of the *Proslogion*, Anselm's (ontological) argument for the existence of God draws upon the nature of place in order to distinguish bodies, God and created spirits: "Certainly that is absolutely limited which, when it is wholly in one place, cannot at the same time be somewhere else. This is seen in the case of bodies alone. But that is unlimited which is wholly everywhere at once; this is true only of You alone. That, however, is limited and unlimited at the same time which, while wholly in one place, can at the same time be wholly somewhere else but not everywhere; and this is true of created spirits." Anselm, *Proslogion*, chapter XIII, in Brian Davis and G.R. Evans, eds., *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 95. It is as though the poem "Of Movement Towards a Natural Place" says, in an ironic, witty manner, in the manner of metaphysical wit: So, here is how the human being reaches to the Godly condition, namely, that through pain (which makes the human being limited, rooted, perhaps, by the gravity of pain) it can be thrown affectively, neurologically and ontologically "somewhere else [if not] everywhere." This is *Da-Sein!* Then comes the sentence from which the poem derives its Latin quotation: "For if the soul were not wholly in each of the parts of the body it would not sense wholly in each of them." Anselm of Canterbury, *ibid*. The wound response is a function of the non-materiality of embodiment.

St. Anselm is also important as a realist in the debates over nominalism and realism. This is the subject for further research especially in the light of the attempt to conflate the doctrine of the arbitrariness of the sign (which Prynne's critical writings, following Benveniste and Jakobsen, expressly refute) with nominalism, an epistemological position about universals and the ontology of properties and quantification over relations. (The most modern version of this medieval debate would be the dialogue between the objectual interpretation of quantification in the work of the late Quine (that existence can only be predicated of objects and that the status of existence cannot be deferred), and the substitutional interpretation of quantification in the work of Ruth Barcan Marcus (that quantification can be over relations, that claims about the status of existence can indeed be deferred). The tendency is to regard Prynne as a nominalist because of the power his poetics accord to language, but the same poetics accepts the independent existence of world and cosmos and affect (and nominalism is notoriously inadequate in

yet neuroleptic but starry and granular. The more
you recall what you call the need for it, she tells
him by a shout down the staircase. You call it
your lost benevolence (little room for charity),
and he rises like a plaque to the sun. Up there the
blood levels of the counter-self come into beat
by immune reflection, by night lines above the cut:

Only at the rim does the day tremble and shine.⁵⁷

In this poem there are three clearly demarcated stanzas, each of ten lines, each beginning at the left hand of the margin, with a final verse line off-set in the isolation of the page. It could not be more visually different than “Again in the Black Cloud”: tight, one might even say, disciplined; controlled, compact; indeed, there is a directedness to the movement, calm and inevitable, which, it can be argued, is a direct function of the stanzaic shape as form – the verticality of the poem, its top to bottom movement – the function of which is in part to dramatize the difference between the inevitable curve of the depicted event – the onset of trauma – with the preternatural calmness of thought – the accession to beatific vision (“Only at the rim does the day tremble and shine”) beyond the banal (“she tells / him by shout

accounting for the language of affect and forms of affectivity), and the creative relationship between both language and world. Here we might consider the epigraph given to *Biting the Air*, to wit, “Every property is the property of something, but it is not the property of just anything. / Ockham, *Summa Logicae*, I:24,” J.H. Prynne, *Biting the Air* (Cambridge: Equipage, 2003). At the same time, there is much in the work that does indeed defer questions of meaning and existence – but this is not nominalism. Here one would need to go further into Prynne’s study of Jakobsen on the relationship between sound and meaning, and the way in which Prynne’s poetic work increasingly explores a linguistic version of John Cage’s acoustic absolutism, a kind of weird and marvelous tension between a metaphysics and physics of sound. As a final example, consider the opening of *To Pollen*: “So were intern attach herded for sound particle / did affix scan to ultramont, for no matter broke / could level cell tropic.” J.H. Prynne, *To Pollen* (London: Barque Press, 2006), 5.

⁵⁷ J. H. Prynne, “Of Movement Towards a Natural Place,” *Wound Response*, 12 / 223.

*down the staircase*⁵⁸). By contrast, Allen Ginsberg's rejection of the left-hand convention of western poetic orthography clearly applies to and informs "Again in the Black Cloud," and, arguably, the entirety of *Wound Response*. Here is Ginsberg quoted *in extenso* from his *Indian Journals* (July 1962), from a section titled "Calcutta typed note. Hotel Amjadia: on Prosody, after a remark several years ago by W.C.W.":

There is no reason why every line must begin at the left hand margin. A silly habit, as if all the thoughts in the brain were lined up like a conscript army. No, thought flows freely thru the page space. Begin new ideas at margin and score their development, exfoliation, on the page organically, showing the shape of the thought, one association on depending indented on another, with space-jumps to indicate gaps & relationships between Thinks, broken syntax to indicate hesitancies & interruption. – GRAPHING the movement of the mind on the page, as you would graph a sentence grammatically to show the relationbetween subjective verb & object in primary school – the arrangement of lines on the page *spread out* to be a rhythmic scoring of the accelerations, pauses & trailings-off of thoughts in their verbal forms as mouth-speech.

[...]

Easier than the arbitrary pattern of a sonnet, we don't *think* in the dialectical rigid pattern of quatrain or synthetic pattern of sonnet: we think in blocks of sensation & images. IF THE POET'S MIND IS SHAPELY HIS ART WILL BE SHAPELY. That is, the page will have an original but rhythmic shape – inevitable thought to inevitable thought, lines dropping inevitably in place on the page, making a subtle infinitely varied rhythmic SHAPE.⁵⁹

Leaving aside the comment on "the arbitrary pattern of a sonnet" – no form that is several centuries' old could be said to be arbitrary –

⁵⁸ My emphasis on "*down the staircase*" to say how, again, the stanzaic shape becomes form in the action of the poem, the containment of movement and affect within the verticality of the poem.

⁵⁹ Allen Ginsberg, *Indian Journals* (1970) (New York: Grove Press, 1996), 40-41.

one could not imagine a better, more telling description of the visual prosody of “Again in the Black Cloud” as a performance scored in and through a *page space* for “the movement of the mind.” Ginsberg shares with Prynne a commitment to composition in the field, even if there is no reason to believe that Prynne accepts wholesale the theory of projective prosody which underwrote the idea of composition in the field in Olson’s conception of that practice.⁶⁰ Ginsberg’s use of hallucinogenic drugs as means of exploration of affective states – “I have with me two bottles of Hallucinogen pills – the mescaline & psilocybin”⁶¹ – is not so far from the use of experimental subjects drawn upon in *Touch, Heat and Pain* and which provides *Wound Response* with its content (if not its *poetic* subject). Here, then, is Ginsberg’s reporting of his experimentation with hallucinogenic pills and affective states:

The lesson of drugs is:
 the experience of the sensation of
 change of the physical body & brain,
 change of brain consciousness
 & how it feels to see
 the inside-outside –
 Snake biting its tale sensation
 of the mind changing (the cellular
 switchboard making new combinations
 So the phone is phoning his
 own number –
 Whoever picks up the phone is you -)
 and seeing if you change the
 cellular combination *all* the way
 you get the final number
 0000–∞⁶²

⁶⁰ Cf. Charles Olson, “Projective Verse” (1950), in James Scully, ed., *Modern Poets on Modern Poetry* (London: Collins, 1966, 1969), 271-82, and William Carlos Williams, “A New Measure” (1954), in James Scully, *Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, 71-72.

⁶¹ Allen Ginsberg, *Indian Journals*, 43.

⁶² Allen Ginsberg, *Indian Journals*, 52-53.

The visual prosody practiced by Ginsberg is an attempt at a form of measurement for “the experience of the sensation of / change of the physical body & brain,” an attempt, as it were, to catch in flow the “change of brain consciousness / & how it feels to see / the inside-outside” with the awareness that this inevitably entails an infinite regression – the unavoidable consequence of trying to capture immediate experience – to “0000- ∞” This is without doubt also the concern of *Wound Response* and “Again in the Black Cloud,” but it is practiced with more rigor and ambition as the poetry seeks to capture different kinds of knowledge, experiences and languages making its subject in part, as we have argued, the problem of equivalent descriptions in its depiction of the experience of *electrical charges across the synapses* during an experience of regression consequent upon extreme, intense, damage; a physical damage *local yet systemic* in implication [in analogy with language] the marks of which are color-predicates, clouds, and discordant, disarticulating organic rhythms. The established scientific technology for the measurement of such states for the “change of brain consciousness” is not, though, a poem, unless, that is, we see the stanzaic shaping of “Again in the Black Cloud” as more than an instance of post-Olsonian composition in the field – it is that, to be sure – but as an activity eminently readable but acoustically dumb, that is, an EEG indexically recording a state of collapse in such a way that technology, observation and affect become imbricated in a powerful discourse of liminality, suspension and the experience of withdrawal from rigid forms of temporality into something in-between as autonomous structuration.

Let us consider the following examples from the greatest neurologist of the nineteenth-century, John Hughlings Jackson, whose central contribution was in the diagnostic description and comprehension of the *action* of epilepsy. First, let it be noted that Hughlings Jackson’s conception of epilepsy – or epileptic discharges or actions – covers a far wider range than might be expected. With this in mind, he gives the following definition: “Epileptic discharges are occasional, abrupt, and excessive discharges of parts of the cerebral hemisphere (paroxysmal discharges).”⁶³ In characterizing the phenomenology of epileptic experience covering a wide range of

⁶³ John Hughlings Jackson, “On the Scientific and Empirical Investigation of Epilepsies,” *Selected Writings of John Hughlings Jackson. Vol. 1: On Epilepsy and Epileptiform Convulsions*, ed., James Taylor (London: Staples Press, 1958), 177.

conditions marked by diminished consciousness, he notes the preponderance of color terms in his *patients' language* of self-reporting:

A paroxysm of red vision, of strong smell in the nose, a paroxysm of vertigo, of spasm of certain parts of the body, tonic followed by clonic (of the hand and forearm, of the cheek, of the foot, of the whole of one side, going on or not into universal convulsion), of coloured vision, with other initial symptoms of an attack of migraine, are all epilepsies. So also is transient loss of consciousness, or loss of consciousness followed instantly by convulsion. In each of these cases there is an abrupt and excessive discharge.⁶⁴

In emphasizing the power of the discharge, its convulsive aspects, Hughlings Jackson comments:

Not only is it very much more excessive than the discharges which occur when we have faint mental states, but it is very much more excessive than those occurring in vivid mental states. [...] There is in some cases of epilepsy evidence of excessive excitation of parts of the brain representing retinal impressions, as the patient has *clouds of colour before his eyes*.⁶⁵

Color, *clouds of colour*, marks not only the onset of epilepsy but the moment of transition, the moment when the subject undergoes displacement from the surety of its connectedness and relations to body, frame and environment and suddenly becomes a spectator as though in a wholly new environment, a strange place, or as if in a strange *country*:

Some patients will tell that in their fits they are not unconscious, but that they do not know where they are; that they hear people talking, but do not know what they

⁶⁴ Hughlings Jackson, "On the Scientific and Empirical Investigation of Epilepsies," 182.

⁶⁵ Hughlings Jackson, "On the Scientific and Empirical Investigation of Epilepsies," 181. My emphasis.

say. It is not at all uncommon for the patient to say that when in a fit he feels as if *in a strange place* – “*in a strange country*,” one of my epileptic patients said.⁶⁶

In a brief description, “Epileptiform Seizures - Aura from the Thumb - Attacks of Coloured Vision,” Hughlings Jackson presents the case of Alice F. “a married woman, aet. 49” who “‘had the colours dreadful.’ [...] The coloured vision was attended by pain in the right superciliary region. Both the pain and the colour came and went suddenly, lasting each time about ten minutes. [...] the colours were violet, white, and orange, and seemed about three yards distant.”⁶⁷ Not infrequently, such attacks in which the patient, as just reported, does not experience a complete loss of consciousness, open onto another state in which “the patient was confused but was quite conscious.”⁶⁸ Hughlings Jackson calls the actions issuing from such experiences *post-paroxysmal actions*, and, tellingly, they are actions “as elaborate and *purposive-seeming* as any of those of [the] normal self”;⁶⁹ the state of unconsciousness itself he terms, more figuratively, a dreamy state during which “there were post-epileptic actions by Z during ‘unconsciousness,’ of a kind which in a man fully himself would be criminal.”⁷⁰ Throughout his writings on epilepsy, Hughlings Jackson works as a descriptive phenomenologist and always pays attention to his patients’ language as well as the role of language in classification and thinking, hence he comments

⁶⁶ Hughlings Jackson, “On the Scientific and Empirical Investigation of Epilepsies,” 187. My emphases.

⁶⁷ Hughlings Jackson, “Epileptiform Seizures - Aura from the Thumb - Attacks of Coloured Vision,” *Selected Writings of John Hughlings Jackson. Vol. 1: On Epilepsy and Epileptiform Convulsions*, ed., James Taylor (London: Staples Press, 1958), 2.

⁶⁸ Hughlings Jackson, “On the Scientific and Empirical Investigation of Epilepsies,” 188.

⁶⁹ Hughlings Jackson, “Case of Epilepsy with Tasting Movements and ‘Dreamy State,’” *Selected Writings of John Hughlings Jackson. Vol. 1: On Epilepsy and Epileptiform Convulsions*, ed., James Taylor (London: Staples Press, 1958), 460. My emphasis.

⁷⁰ Hughlings Jackson, “Case of Epilepsy with Tasting Movements and ‘Dreamy State,’” 460.

that, although medical men speak *clinically* of loss of consciousness as if it were a well-defined entity called consciousness, there is probably not amongst educated persons any such belief. We must for clinical purposes have arbitrary standards (definitions by type). It is thus the universal custom of medical men to speak of “confusion,” “stupor,” “loss of consciousness,” and “coma,” although every medical man sees cases in which there are all conceivable degrees from slightest confusion of thought to deepest coma.⁷¹

The utterances of Z in the emergence, that is, the *transition* from this dreamy state (“The famous dreamy state, the uncinete seizure [...], with its illusions, its ecmnesia, its paramnesia, its rushes of dreams, its anxiety and nightmare-filled atmosphere”⁷²) as recorded by Hughlings Jackson, were such as

For about the last fortnight about the legs are about the gradual for several debts of the [;]

and:

There [then a word obliterated] was constant repetition of sickness for the last twenty-four hours. Abdomen [this word crossed out]. The sick [...] on the grateful rightness has felt a large knowfulness.⁷³

As we return to Hughlings Jackson’s report of his patient Z it is crucial that we understand that internally – that is, for the patient – experiencing his condition there was a subjective awareness of continuity, hence Hughlings Jackson comments, “In his slight attacks there was, he told me, a sentence in his mind which was as if well

⁷¹ Hughlings Jackson, “On the Scientific and Empirical Investigation of Epilepsies,” 187.

⁷² Henry Ey, *Consciousness: A Phenomenological Study of Being Conscious and Becoming Conscious* (1963), trans. John H. Flodstrom (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), 186.

⁷³ Hughlings Jackson, “Case of Epilepsy with Tasting Movements and ‘Dreamy State,’” 461.

remembered. For example, if anyone was at the time speaking to him it would be as if he (Z) were trying to remember it, as if it were familiar, but yet he could not remember it. Again he said – I give the words I hastily wrote in my case-book, here intercalating other words in square brackets – ‘attending to what was going on in [my] mind because [it was] interesting, and dim to what [was] going on outside.’ He could not, on recovery, remember what the ‘interesting matter’ was.”⁷⁴ The many examples of Z’s language recorded by Hughlings Jackson are all filled with pathos. Here, as Hughlings Jackson puts it, is another *specimen*:

For the last few days his beginning (starting to walk?) is more difficult for his tenderness of speechlessness and quick power of talk light swollenness of feet last three days.⁷⁵

The utterances and articulations of patient Z make sense in many different ways, but largely they make sense privatively: they are like fossils of an unreconstructable past at the same time as they themselves actively register failure, inability, unsuccessful attempts, that is, actions, a powerful aspect of which is their rhythms of blockage - especially important here is the demonstrative adjective *the*

For about the last fortnight about the legs are about the for several debts of the (Z adds, “no connection in thought traceable for the word ‘debts’.”)⁷⁶

Clearly, the demonstrative *the* is seeking its noun: the syntactical failure here registers as phenomenological, that is, it embodies the movement of experience, it articulates and expresses it: expression and representation - the articulations we call discursive formations - are not separate but necessarily different moments of an *act*: one is

⁷⁴ Hughlings Jackson, “Case of Epilepsy with Tasting Movements and ‘Dreamy State,’” 458-459.

⁷⁵ Hughlings Jackson, “Case of Epilepsy with Tasting Movements and ‘Dreamy State,’” 460.

⁷⁶ Hughlings Jackson, “Case of Epilepsy with Tasting Movements and ‘Dreamy State,’” 461.

not superior to the other, though it can fairly be said that poetic language of this kind is concerned more with the expressive moment of representation since failure at the discursive level necessarily pointed either to distortion or to some aspect of the expressive medium as flawed (in the neurological sense, for example) which may then become paradigmatic for alternative modes of attention. In diction, in imagery, in rhythm – one might even say, in prosody – and phenomenology of experience we are on the same terrain as *Wound Response* and its phenomenology of language and sub- and supra-liminal autonomy explored in “Again in the Black Cloud”:

Air to blood

are the two signs, flushed with the sound:

- (a) “tended to refrain from aimless wandering”
- (b) “experienced less dizziness”
- (c) “learned to smile a little”
- (d) “said they felt better and some indeed
seemed happier” –

Through this diction of itemization there is a dueling of language(s): first, the items of observation which firmly and definitively withhold any pronominal identification thereby blurring any line between the language of observation and the language of self-reporting – the model for which is Hughlings Jackson, or at the very least the type of which is that provided in Hughlings Jackson, consistently understood as an infrastructural poetic language of the kind, for example, found in Celan’s “Gespräch im Gebirg” (Conversation in the Mountains, 1959) where the folding of the earth (“once and twice and three times”⁷⁷), with water colored “green, and the green is white” (*GG* 25 / 19), is a demonstrative language (“the language that counts here, the green with the white in it,” *GG* 25 / 19) but also “a language not for you and not for me [...] a language, well, without I and without You, nothing but He, nothing but It, you understand, and She, nothing but that.” (*GG* 25 / 19-20.) The passage (a), (b), (c), to (d) renders, too,

⁷⁷ Paul Celan, “Gespräch im Gebirg” (1960), *Der Meridian und andere Prosa* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), 25; Paul Celan, “Conversation in the Mountains,” *Collected Prose*, trans. Rosemarie Waldrop (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1986), 19. All subsequent citations from this work will be in text, German followed by English.

the sense that some thing is being looked at - become a third-person objection - in the course of being objectified, in the way that not only people, but feelings, emotions and pain can be studied in experimental conditions of the kind framed in the Ciba Foundation symposium on *Touch, Heat, and Pain*, but found, too, in raw, brute poetic forms in the reporting of Hughlings Jackson. In this respect, the diction of itemizing becomes part of a discourse upon *objectness*, in an occluded manner befitting the mode of thematising, of shadowing another language upon *personhood* whose poetic virtue is the curious quality of suspension that surrounds the passages, the actions in quotation marks:

- (a) “tended to refrain from aimless wandering”
- (b) “experienced less dizziness”
- (c) “learned to smile a little
- (d) “said they felt better and some indeed
seemed happier” [...]. (*WR* 20 / 230)

The quality of suspension conveyed by this indetermination between third-person, passive positionality and a loss of directed temporalization in superposition is due not only to the lack of pronominal identification, but also to the way in which (i) the itemization slows the reading process almost to a halt, and (ii) and the way in which passivity, in the constructions (a), (b), (c), and (d), becomes the norm from the beginning of the poem's actions where “Shouts rise again” and “flecks of cloud skim over / to storm-light.” This tension of the implied external observation point with the floating internal experience of vague attending in diminished consciousness – the tension, too, between the indexical recording of the EEG and the silence of the subjection on which the event of recording is predicated - points not only to differing temporalities but to a discourse on personhood: at what point, under what conditions does a given use of language no longer require the supposition that the “object” of its address be any longer a person, a subject? At what temporal “moment,” under what phenomenological conditions of self-experience does “one” cease to be a “person”? Might the occlusion of language in its “medico-social” usage give a paradigm for this *possibly* constitutive relation between “language” and “personhood”? Here one might think of the language of an emergency room situation with a doctor looking at the EEG (measuring the electrical activity of the brain, not necessarily for the diagnosis of epilepsy) *as well as* glancing

at the patient, shouting, “She’s fading, she’s fading! She’s gone.” (See, here, fig.1 and the rectangular band on the cover of *Wound Response* as a sign of a particular steady-state movement....) What was fading? When did it begin to fade? And when was it gone? Was the doctor addressing the EEG or some comparable instrument of measurement, the body, or the person? Did the instrument, in other words, *stand in* for the patient in some manner more than merely heuristic? No sooner can these questions be posed than the rhythm of the poem suddenly picks up and begins to move with rapidity from the vocal field of inferred human activity to another acoustic field (rich in signs) marked by an identification with animality in the form of snow-beasts:

Air to blood
 are the two signs, flushed with the sound:
 (a) “tended to refrain from aimless wandering”
 (b) “experienced less dizziness”
 (c) “learned to smile a little”
 (d) “said they felt better and some indeed
 seemed happier” –out in the
 snow-fields the aimless beasts
 mean what they do, so completely the shout
 is dichroic in gratitude,
 half-silvered, the
 gain control set for “rescue” at
 negative echo line.⁷⁸ The clouds now “no longer
 giving light but full of it,” the entry condition a daze
 tending to mark zero. Shouting and
 laughing and intense felicity given over, rises
 under the hill as *timinitus aurium*, hears the
 child her blue
 coat! his new
 shoes and boat!

⁷⁸ *Negative echo* here might point to yet another variant of cloud iconology if taken to point to clouds of ultracold (Fermionic) gases at the crossover mark of localized density disturbances, hence the image chain thereby set with with “the snow fields.”

From the language of suspended states – neurological and categorical - the rhythm of the poem suddenly picks up and rushes out into the expanse – the membrane – of wildness in movements and shouts (“Shouting and / laughing and intense felicity”), returning to the color predicates for the intensity of the movements and shouts bordering on unbearable joy as concentrated in the pained acoustic perception embodied in *tinnitus aurium* understood as both pathological condition and synaesthetic state. At the same time, the language of the poem returns to the language of clouds also as a mark of intensity where

The clouds now “no longer
giving light but full of it,”

come with the clanging, disjointed rhythms suggestive of raucous childlike play which, prosodically, one might almost scan as cretics (– x –) in order to capture the discordancy of counterpointing movements:

hears the
child her blue
coat! his new
shoes and boat!

The concentration of sound, color and implied temporal regression suggests a variation upon the language of interiority found in “Treatment in the Field” as well as “Again in the Black Cloud” as

The clouds now “no longer
giving light but full of it,” the entry condition a daze
tending to mark zero. Shouting and
laughing and intense felicity given over, rises
under the hill as *tinnitus aurium*, hears the
child her blue
coat! his new
shoes and boat!

The clouds that are so filled with light that they daze, reduce to zero, serve to mark a gathering up of a rich and complex movement of affirmation and negation of cloud language in Prynne from the time of *Day Light Songs* in 1968 – that is, before and continuous with *The*

White Stones (1969) – *Voll Verdienst*⁷⁹ (first published in *Poems*, 1982 but manifestly continuous with *Day Light Songs*) through *Into the Day* (1972) and *Wound Response* (1974) and up to an including *The Oval Window* in 1983 where each sequence sets the idea of journey not merely in terms of the boundary between interior and exterior, but does so through a radical language of materiality based in neurological experiences for which the imaginal language of clouds is the mark of a regulative indistinction of situatedness, of boundary and place relocated and conceived in partly Aristotelian, partly Bergsonian, but largely post-Jacksonian terms as neural space as the form taken in this poetry and poetics of the *question of place* (the figures of which range from the possible gases of superconductivity - the negative echo line in the black cloud - to the oval window of the inner ear). If the dominant controlling figure of autonomy in *Wound Response* is the central nervous system in a state of brietal infusion – that is, artificially or experimentally induced narcosis – the image of autonomy in *The Oval Window* is the same principle now transferred to the mechanism of the inner ear – the oval window⁸⁰ – but both are linked through the middle term of neural space, and as such become topological transforms of each other, precisely, the language deployed in the poem “Of Movement Towards a Natural Place” where the wound (“the charge”) not yet a physically observable bruise “is still there in neural space,” which is then glossed through a direct quotation from *Touch, Heat and Pain* as

⁷⁹ Cf. J.H. Prynne, *Voll Verdienst* (undated), in *Poems* (Edinburgh and London: Agneau 2, 1982), 33-36.

⁸⁰ In this respect, though gratitude is due to Nigel Reeve and Richard Kerridge for their pioneering interpretation of *The Oval Window*, W. Ritchie Russell’s comment in his review of *Touch, Heat and Pain* that “The anatomy and physiology of sensation are both still, in many respects, *most obscure*” is pertinent to issues of the ear / hearing (and for both the import of electron microscopy photography) precisely for the constructive use of obscurity, the running up against the limits of language and representation. Cf. N.H. Reeve and Richard Kerridge, “*The Oval Window*,” *Nearly Too Much: The Poetry of J.H. Prynne* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), 147-191. This chapter was subsequently expanded as “Deaf to Meaning: On J.H. Prynne’s *The Oval Window*,” *Parataxis* / available through the online journal *Jacket*, no. 20, December 2002; see, too, the excellent interview with the artist Ian Friend, Richard Humphrey, “Drawing on Prynne: Tacit Conversations with Ian Friend and his Work,” in Ian Brinton, ed., *A Manner of Utterance: The Poetry of J.H. Prynne* (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2009), 36-50.

“By this I mean a distribution
of neurons ... some topologically preserved transform”
(WR 12 / 223).

The cloud so full of light that it dazes, renders to a condition of zero,
is also linked to (a crazed, a *touched*) sounding in *Day Light Songs* in
multiple ways: first through the descended light (of sanctity) called a
halo:

Do not deny this halo
the shouts are
against nothing we all
stand at variance
we walk slowly if it
hurts we rant it
is not less than true oh
love I tell you so

(*Poems*, 29)

but also by implicit allusion to the elements of breath, of sigh (“Who shall make the / sigh,” *Poems*, 28) that, with impulse, will make for sound as well as mark the threshold, the experience of passage and transition, whence the apophatic dimension always present in multiple registers (literary, meteorological, cosmological, theological) of the title “Again in the *Black Cloud*” is made intelligible by reference to the opening lyric of *Day Light Songs* which opens on the topos of breathing as the essence of poetry (following Rilke, Celan, but also Wordsworth)

Inhale breathe deeply and [.]

Then, simply, mysteriously – as though Wallace Stevens’ “The Poem that took the Place of a Mountain” encountered the ascent to Sinai (“the book [...] in dust,”) which reminded how one had “Shifted the rocks and picked his way among the clouds”⁸¹ – there is the rendition

⁸¹ There it was, word for word,

of apartness, signaled and enacted through the blank space after *Inhale*, with a mountain – *the* mountain - surfacing in the lucid, divine indicative calm of thereness:

Inhale breathe deeply and
 there the mountain
 is there are
 flowers streams flow
simple bright goods clutter
 the ravines the
air is thin and heady
 the mountain
respires, is equal to
 the whole

(*Poems*, 26)

The poem that took the place of a mountain.

He breathed its oxygen,
Even when the book lay turned in the dust of his table.

It reminded him how he had needed
A place to go in his own direction.

How he had recomposed the pines,
Shifted the rocks and picked his way among the clouds,

For the outlook that would be right,
Where he would be complete in an unexplained completion:

The exact rock where his inexactnesses
Would discover, at last, the view toward which they had edged,

Where he could lie and, gazing down at the sea,
Recognize his unique and solitary home.

Wallace Stevens, "The Poem that took the Place of a Mountain," *The Collected Poems* (New York: Knopf, 1954, 1982), 512.

which figures the moment of liminality propadeutic to transfiguration such as is found, for example, in the Buddha's Fire-Sermon, in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, no less than in Moses ascent to Mount Sinai, the medium of which transfiguration is the voice. The encounter based upon an acoustic performance is an approach taken up and reworked in the staging of Celan's "Gespräch im Gebirg" (Conversation in the Mountains). Celan's "Gespräch im Gebirg" will figure the preparation for the vocal encounter under the aegis of clouds (Gewölk), when

One evening, when the sun had set and not only the sun,
the Jew [...] went off one evening when various things had
set, went under clouds, went in the shadow, his own and
not his own (GG 23 / 17)

and, moreover, draws upon Büchner's Lenz:

so he went off and walked along this road, this beautiful,
incomparable road, walked like Lenz, through the
mountains. (GG 23 / 17)

This passage cannot, of course, but recall Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai where Jahweh will encounter him *in a dark cloud* (Exodus 19, v. 9), or where *Moses approached the dark cloud where God was* (Exodus 20, v. 21),⁸² there, in the language of *Day Light Songs* where the "air is thin & heady," and "So much is just / by pulse." (*Poems*, 26.) Moses' walk (into fire, into the dark cloud) is an ascent, Lenz' walk into the mountains ("when the storm forced the clouds down into the valleys [...] or when the clouds reared up like wildly whinnying horses [...]; or when the stormwind blew the clouds down and away [...] and tiny clouds drifted pass on silver wings"⁸³) is a collapse and the model for Celan's vocal landscape of transfiguration ("The earth [is] folded *up* here," GG 25 / 19, my emphasis) which is also the language of emergent poetic experience. Likewise does Prynne's language of poetic experience (fictional, biographical, fictive) take in its walks: with Coleridge (out of doors, there where sound is generative of its

⁸² Cf. Denys Turner, "The Allegory and Exodus," *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995, 1999), 16-18.

⁸³ Georg Büchner, *Lenz*, 249-250.

own world “more sublime than any sight can be, more absolutely *suspending the power of comparison*”), with Celan (with Lenz through Celan, and Celan through Büchner), with Büchner (and Lenz, and Celan), but above all with Hölderlin, the Hölderlin of “In lieblicher Bläue...” from which the title *Voll Verdienst* is derived, a lyric sequence composed, as I have suggested, in a manner continuous with *Day Light Songs* and the concerns of *Wound Response*.

“Voll Verdienst, doch dichterisch, wohnt des Mensch auf dieser Erde”:⁸⁴ “Full of acquirements” is Hamburger’s early translation of “Voll Verdienst”: “Full of acquirements, but poetically, man dwells on this earth.”⁸⁵ “Full of merit” is Albert Hofstadter’s attempt in his translation of Heidegger:

Full of merit, yet poetically, man
Dwells on this earth⁸⁶

which attempt maintains Stefan Schimanski’s translation from 1949:

Full of merit, and yet poetically, dwells
Man on this earth.⁸⁷

Richard Sieburth renders it as “Well deserving”:

Well deserving, yet poetically

⁸⁴ Friedrich Hölderlin, “In lieblicher Bläue...,” *Sämtliche Werke*, 372.

⁸⁵ Friedrich Hölderlin, “In lieblicher Bläue...,” *Poems and Fragments*, trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Routledge and Paul, 1966), 601.

⁸⁶ Cf. Martin Heidegger, “... Poetically Man Dwells ...,” *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Colophon, 1975), 216.

⁸⁷ Martin Heidegger, “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry,” *Existence and Being* (trans. Stefan Schimanski) ((South Bend, IN.: Regnery, 1949, 1979), 282. *Existence and Being* (with an introduction and analysis by Werner Brock, then at the University of Cambridge), is a translation of Heidegger’s *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* (1936), and is the first selection of Heidegger’s work to be published in English. *Erläuterungen* is the same volume translated by Corbin, Michel Deguy, Francois Fédiér and Jean Launay as *Approches de Hölderlin* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962). I believe this early volume, *Existence and Being*, is of more than passing relevance to Prynne. A new translation has recently appeared as Martin Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry* (trans. Keith Hoeller) (Amherst: Humanity’s Books, 2000).

Man dwells on this earth,⁸⁸

whilst the French poet-translator André du Bouchet gives us “Riche en mérites” (rich in accomplishments, rich in merits),

Riche en mérites, mais poétiquement toujours,
Sur terre habite l’homme⁸⁹

maintaining the earlier (1937) translation of Henry Corbin deployed in his French translation of Heidegger’s “Hölderlin et l’essence de la poésie”:

Riche en mérites, c’est poétiquement pourtant
Que l’homme habite sur cette terre⁹⁰

and accepted by Michel Deguy and Francois Fédier (1951) in their own translation of “Hölderlin et l’essence de la poésie” (based upon Corbin’s earlier translation).⁹¹ But “doch” (adverb and conjunction) – all are agreed that “poetically man dwells on this earth,” but what of “doch” – the caesura thereby created – which becomes *but* for Hamburger, *yet* for Sieburth, *pourtant* (yet, however, though) for Corbin, and *mais* (but) for du Bouchet? There is an oddity about this passage, a privative sense that Heidegger was amongst the first to exploit,⁹² as though that which is poetic in some way points to a diminution:

⁸⁸ Cf. Friedrich Hölderlin, “In lieblicher Blaue . . .,” *Hymns and Fragments*, trans. Richard Sieburth (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 249.

⁸⁹ Cf. Friedrich Hölderlin, “En bleu adorable...,” *Oeuvres*, ed., Philippe Jaccottet (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 939.

⁹⁰ Martin Heidegger, “Hölderlin et l’essence de la poésie” (trans. by Henry Corbin), *Mésures*, no. 3, 1937, 120-143; rpd. Martin Heidegger, *Qu’est-ce que la métaphysique?* Suivi d’extraits sur *l’être et le temps* et d’une conférence sur Hölderlin (trans. Henry Corbin) (Gallimard: Paris, 1938, 1951), 244.

⁹¹ Cf. Martin Heidegger, “Hölderlin et l’essence de la poésie” (trans. Michel Deguy and Francois Fédier), *Approches de Hölderlin* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 53.

⁹² Cf. Martin Heidegger who writes: “Before it are the words: ‘Full of merit, yet’ They sound almost as if the next word, ‘poetically,’ introduced a restriction on the profitable, meritorious dwelling of man.” Martin Heidegger,

Voll Verdienst, doch dichterisch, wohnet des Mensch auf
dieser Erde,

all the more so when it is taken into account that *Verdienst* can also point to deserving or deserts, as “man wird ihn nach Verdienst behandeln: he will be treated according to his deserts,” that is, according to rank, according to what befits, but no less, too, than what he deserves, that is, the implicit sense of judgment which allowed Hamlet, as is well known, to reply to Polonius’ innocent comment about hospitality towards the players, “My lord, I will use them according to their desert,”

God’s bodkin, man, much better. Use every man after his desert, and who should ’scape whipping? Use them after your own honour and dignity: the less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty.⁹³

What, indeed, should be left of us if we were to receive our just deserts? There is, in this short passage from *Hamlet*, a whole lesson on commentary as well as in commentary for the German *Verdienst*, the French *mérite*, and the English *desert* and *deserve* and their cognates, a lesson rich in exegetical as well as soteriological implications. Hence why the title of the short lyrics of Prynne’s *Voll Verdienst* remains untranslated, but whose presence in a suite of *English* poems comes with adjacent histories and commentaries from Hamlet to Heidegger.

This is the point at which in many a reflection upon Prynne’s work the reading becomes positively mediated by Heidegger, but this, rather, is precisely the moment that requires differentiation, where it needs be noticed that the poetry is both responsive to yet departs from Heidegger’s thought and his violent reading of Hölderlin. Heidegger’s reading is indeed pertinent to Prynne’s poetics, as also the nature of the movement of the poetry, that is, the manner in which it walks with other poetries and in bringing certain poetries into new alignments and configurations thereby sets up new

“... Poetically Man Dwells ...,” *Poetry, Language, Thought* (trans. Albert Hofstadter) (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 216.

⁹³ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II.ii.524- 527, Harold Jenkins, ed., *The Arden Shakespeare* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982).

interpretative chambers of reception, not only between philosophy and poetry, Heidegger's main concern, but also science, or, to be more precise, the language of science understood not only as knowledge produced by a certain methodology understood, by Heidegger, to be an objectifying form of experience, but, for Prynne, where science is understood as a form of knowledge capable of entering the cloud of ignorance from which a new set of questions, languages and preoccupations can be formulated, whence the demand for materiality in Prynne's poetry, a materiality provided by neurology and relatedly the science concerned with the incomparably small (the oval window) which can only be revealed to human vision through technologies of magnification (electron microscopy). Heidegger's question of dwelling, by which he approaches Hölderlin's late poetry, that is the poetry of Hölderlin's madness (c. 1805-1843), is certainly relevant to Prynne, as can be seen from the way in which Heidegger registers the privative dimension of the famous utterance:

Full of merit, and yet poetically, dwells
Man on this earth.⁹⁴

Heidegger comments (in the Schimanski-Brock translation of *Erläuterungen*):

What man works at and pursues is through his own endeavours earned and deserved. "Yet" – says Hölderlin in sharp antithesis, all this does not touch the essence of his sojourn on this earth, all this does not reach the foundation of being-there. The latter is fundamentally "poetic." But we now understand poetry as the inaugural naming of the gods and of the essence of things.

To "dwell poetically" means: to stand in the presence of the gods and to be touched by proximity to the essence of things. Being-there is "poetic" in its fundamental aspect – which means at the same time: in so far as it is founded, it is not something merited, but a gift.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Martin Heidegger, "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry," *Existence and Being*, 282.

⁹⁵ Martin Heidegger, "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry," *Existence and Being*, 282-83. Translation modified.

Clearly for Prynne, Heidegger's formulation of the question of the gods will not be his, though there will indeed be question of the sacrality of naming. The strong antithetical *doch / yet* of Hölderlin's language hinges, indeed, upon the radical movement entailed in being "touched [betroffen]⁹⁶ by proximity to the essence of things," knowledge of which may well be considered a gift, but Prynne and Heidegger, as practioners of thought, will take the implication of this sense of radical contrastive movement in different senses of truth and the understanding of science. The conclusion at which Heidegger's poetics arrives about the role of truth as *A-letheia* (unconcealedness), the image of which is that of light being torn away from darkness, as distinct from scientific truth which is conceived as a violence of abstraction imposed through a violent language of objectivity, this is not the conclusion of Prynne's poetry or the means of its poetics. In this respect, Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin, which should be no surprise, is over-determined. There is, though, a passage in Heidegger's Hölderlin reflections where, tellingly, he speaks of the nature of poetic experience in Hölderlin as the experience of the in-between: Heidegger's term for the condition of Hölderlin's in-betweenness is *Zwischenbereich*, which I should translate less as the kingdom of the Between – though this is by no means incorrect – than as the *field or zone* (Bereich) of the Between (Zwischen), close, indeed, to Freud's characterization of the analyst's experience, that is, the experience that befalls the one who must first receive and *bear* (carry, support)⁹⁷ what is received, the initially (and perhaps

⁹⁶ Heidegger's text says that poetic dwelling is "stehen und betroffen sein von der Wesensnähe der Dinge," where "betroffen" is the past participle of *betreffen*, the sense of which is to be disconcerted, dazed, confounded, perplexed in and by the near essence (proximity) of things, hence my modifying the translation to speak of being *touched* with its hint or suggestion of derangement or disorientation. Consider that in a slightly older English colloquialism than is now current one could refer to some one "not all there" as "a bit touched." Cf. Martin Heidegger, "Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung," *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klosterman, 1981), 42.

⁹⁷ Here consider Jacques Derrida's question: "Que veut dire *porter*? Nous nous sommes déjà souvent demandé, en plus d'une langue, ce que signifie *porter*, to carry, to bear, *tragen*, en particulier [...], pour tenter de cerner le sens de *Walten*, autour de *Austrag*, à savoir une sorte de contrat de la différence

permanently) unintelligible transfers of affect from another, as *Zwischenreich*, the domain or kingdom of Betweenness, and interregnum. J.-B. Pontalis, who has made this hint from Freud on in-betweenness (*entre* in French) a presence in his attempt to think the fluidity of the non-conceptual, has characterize this condition of passivity as the intermediary: “as analysts and perhaps as human beings, we are fated [voués], to remain in what Freud named in certain passages *Zwischenreich*.”⁹⁸ It is here, in the thinking of the field of the open of the Between, the *Zwischenbereich*, that the difference and relation of Prynne to Heidegger’s reading can be grasped.

In developing his reading of Hölderlin, Heidegger makes frequent recourse to mediation, but it is not, of course, a materialist conception of mediation in play, rather it is hermeneutic, for, consistent with the conception of truth as *A-letheia*, that that which is is the act of being uncovered, unconcealed, revealed, as that with which Dasein is in a primordial attunement. The poet, of which Hölderlin is the type, for Heidegger, is he who is open to the signs of the gods, whence Heidegger quotes the following as example of how the gods speak:

... and the signs to us from antiquity are the language of the gods

which it is the nature of the speech of the poet, that is, in what poetic language consists, to expose itself to such signs, in other words: “The speech of the poet is the intercepting of these signs, in order to pass them on to his own people.”⁹⁹ Indeed, it is said that “The foundation of being is bound to the signs of the gods. And at the same time poetic speech [utterance] is only the interpretation of the ‘voice of the people.’ This is how Hölderlin names the saying in which a people remembers that it belongs to the totality of all that exists.”¹⁰⁰ This is the first sense of mediation relevant to Heidegger’s conception of the poet: the poet intercepts the signs of the gods and stands between the

ontologique.” Jacques Derrida, *Séminaire: La Bête et le souverain*, Volume II (2002-2003) (Paris: Galilée, 2010), 357.

⁹⁸ J.B. Pontalis, “Penser l’intermédiaire,” in *Le Royaume intermédiaire: Psychanalyse, littérature, autour de J.-B. Pontalis* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), 317-318.

⁹⁹ Martin Heidegger, “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry,” *Existence and Being*, 287. Translation modified.

¹⁰⁰ Martin Heidegger, “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry,” *Existence and Being*, 287-288. Translation modified.

people and the signs of the gods: "In this way the essence of poetry is joined on to the laws of the signs of the gods and of the voice of the people, laws which tend towards and away from each other. The poet himself stands between the former – the gods, and the latter – the people. He is the one who has been thrown out – out into that *Between* [jenes Zwischen], between [zwischen] the gods and men. But only and for the first time in this *Between* [in diesem Zwischen] is it decided, *who man is and where he is settling his Dasein* [wer der Mensch sei und wo er sein Dasein]. 'Poetically, dwells man on this earth.'¹⁰¹ To be sure, Prynne has no need for the nationalist, petit-bourgeois *volkische Gewäsche* of the National Poet presented by Heidegger, not least because, from "The Numbers" onward, the opening poem of *Kitchen Poems*, there is deep and abiding concern with discretion and brevity along with a commitment to scale and tact at odds with Heidegger. Even as Heidegger seeks to make of Hölderlin a national(ist) poet, the very letters of Hölderlin which he invokes, such as the letter to his mother dated 1 January 1799, make clear Hölderlin's cosmopolitanism and disdain for nationalism. Here, Hölderlin's case is strictly comparable to that of Nietzsche. What is operant in Prynne, however, is the idea of the open, of the field of the in-between condition where the question is open as to *who (or what) is man and where he is settling his Dasein*. The poet is not, as implied in Heidegger's diction, something akin to Milton's Satan secularized – the secularization of a sacred *Gewalt* – since in this respect being "ein Hinausgeworfener"¹⁰² (one thrown out, cast out) is a modality of *Geworfenheit* (throwness) which is a condition of *Da-sein* as such and so cannot be the distinguishing mark or condition of the poet as such; rather the poet as being composite with language through which throwness might be grasped is the *thinker* of the conditions of the in-between, the inter-regnum of orders (linguistic, cosmological, anthropological and, yes, zoological), the one sensitive to the exposure of the in-between where the danger of the condition of the in-between – for, following Hölderlin, Heidegger plays with the tension of poetry as an activity at once innocent and dangerous in the Hölderlinian conception – is articulated in and through the

¹⁰¹ Martin Heidegger, "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry," *Existence and Being*, 288-289. Second emphasis mine.

¹⁰² Martin Heidegger, "Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung," *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, 47.

availability or no of a second-order activity, the power or capacity, in other words, to give representation to what would otherwise remain immediate (or prepredicative / pre-linguistic) experience (“How / does he not feel a feeling,” it is said, for example, in “An Evening Walk,” *WR* 16 / 227), to bring within the field of attention the energies and forces, without beginning or end, which make for representation, of which the sudden movement and flow and rushing forth of images might be conceived as the type. Hence Heidegger comments: “Unceasingly and ever more securely, out of the fullness of the images pressing about him and always more simply, did Hölderlin devote his poetic speech to the zone of the Between.”¹⁰³ Prynne’s walk (*Der Spatziergang*) with Hölderlin takes this measure of simplicity inherent to the practice of late Hölderlin, keys it into the presence of cloud register and makes of it the means for rendering the sense of *being touched by proximity to the essence of things* at the threshold of equivalent descriptions, of being in movement, in the in-between zones of radical affection, that is, passivity, where the field is doubled-valued at the divine point.

In the late work “An Zimmern” where the image of the walk is figured footpaths and lines of life:

The lines of life are various; they diverge and cease
Like footpaths and the mountains utmost end,¹⁰⁴

which in Prynne’s *Voll Verdienst* will become the simplicity mediated by the *Lyrical Ballads* but even more the Blake of “The Little Boy Lost,” “The Little Boy Found” and “Nurses Song,”¹⁰⁵ the near diction of nursery rime:

Follow the line the same
way down and

¹⁰³ Martin Heidegger, “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry,” *Existence and Being*, 289. Translation modified.

¹⁰⁴ Friedrich Hölderlin, “An Zimmern” (To Zimmer), *Poems and Fragments*, 589.

¹⁰⁵ William Blake, *Songs Of Innocence and Of Experience*, in David V. Erdman, ed., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (New York and London: Anchor Doubleday, 1988), 11 and 23.

pale in the sky.¹⁰⁶

The sky, pale, with or without clouds, is the mark and space of the open, the field of the in-between, there from which expulsion is felt, where fate rejects:

Leave in disgrace with
 fortune in
 her face & eye

which openness is tracked through the moving calmness of the poem “Der Sommer,” the second and closing stanza of which reads:

So now the day moves on through the hill and valley,
 Not to be stopped and in its beam arrayed,
 And clouds move calmly on through lofty space
 As though the year in majesty delayed

suggesting the idyll of slowed, pastoral time reveals the possibility of loss in timelessness in its signature, under the mask of an assumed name, “Your humble and obedient servant Scardanelli, March 9th 1940,” a type of imaginary dating entirely characteristic of certain forms of schizoid experience. Throughout the late poems, the measure is calm, the tone one of marked control, the diction of great simplicity, but all the more effective than the transitions to or recognition of threat or violence, for example in “Der Spaziergang” (The Walk), which opens:

You wayside woods, well painted

¹⁰⁶ “Follow the line the same / way down.” If the language of cloud imagery is a privileged reflex in Prynne so, too, is the language of *line* and *edge*: “Only at the rim does the day tremble and shine” (*WR* 12 / 223); “the cells of the child line” and “the / child line dips into sleep” (*WR* 20 and 21 / 230 and 231); the “negative echo line” (*WR* 20 / 230); from *Into the Day*: “Here begins the world line of the sphere” (*Poems*, 213); “there / is shear at the flowline” (*Poems*, 214); or “the clear / margin” of “The Glacial Question, Unsolved” (*The White Stones*, 37 / 65). The examples can be multiplied, and may be the basis for working out the relationship between metonymy and metaphor in Prynne’s poetics.

On the green and sloping glade
Where I conduct my footsteps
With lovely quiet repaid
For every thorn in my bosom,
When dark are my mind and heart
Which paid from the beginning
In grief for thought and art,

and concludes, again with the auguries / omen of cloud language:

The godhead [Gottheit] kindly escorts us,
At first with unblemished blue,
Later with clouds provided,
Well rounded and grey in hue,
With scorching flashes and rolling
Of thunder, and charm of the fields,
With beauty the swelling source of
The primal image yields.¹⁰⁷

This is the power of the open, the Godhead of “unblemished blue, / Later with clouds,” and “With scorching flashes,” the open which in “Patmos” is characterized as that which “Unceasingly God disperses.”¹⁰⁸ In a letter to Casimir Ulrich Böhlendorff (4 December 1801), drawing upon Goethe’s “Die Grenzen der Menschheit” (the boundaries / limits of mankind), we learn that Hölderlin, in opening himself to the world, believed that the Ancient and holy Father – Zeus – *with a calm hand signals his disturbance, his benediction, in the form of lightning, through reddening clouds*, which became for Hölderlin his sign of election:

O friend! The world opens to me brighter and more grave than usual. Yes, what is happening pleases me as when in summer the ancient and holy Father, “from the heights of reddening clouds, with a calm hand, pours down blessings in lightning.” For among everything that I can see of God, this sign has become my chosen one. Once, I could jubilate

¹⁰⁷ Friedrich Hölderlin, “Der Spazierung” (The Walk), *Poems and Fragments*, 577. Translation very slightly modified.

¹⁰⁸ Friedrich Hölderlin, “Patmos,” *Poems and Fragments*, 469.

about a new truth, a more just conception about what is above and around us; now, it is my fear that in the end I shall be submitted to the same fate as Tantalus who received from the gods more than he could digest.¹⁰⁹

As fascinating as the cloud language of power in the letter to Böhlendorff is the manner in which Hölderlin declares not only the fear of receiving more than what one may be able to digest in the opening to the world, but equally that he cannot, on his *path*, seek to be free from the derangement, the proximal *touch* of the gods, and further, that he cannot be free from danger, cannot, indeed, comprehend a thinking of death in terms of simple oppositions:

it would be impious and utterly mad to seek a path sheltered from all derangement, and there does not exist any simply oppositions to death.¹¹⁰

Heidegger is assuredly right to say that “The excessive brightness has driven the poet into darkness,”¹¹¹ and it is all too easy to see how this condition will be picked up in the culture of post-Symbolism and Surrealism beginning with the translation of Hölderlin’s late work by Pierre Jean Jouve and Pierre Klossowski as *Poèmes de la folie de Hölderlin* (1930)¹¹² which will, in turn, be taken up by the young, highly gifted English Surrealist David Gascoyne as *Hölderlin’s Madness* (1938), a set of free adaptations¹¹³ of Hölderlin interspersed with original work by Gascoyne which take as a guiding thread – in both the free adaptations and original work - this paradox of light and dark

¹⁰⁹ Friedrich Hölderlin, letter to Casimir Ulrich Böhlendorff, December 4, 1801, in *Essays and Letters on Theory*, translated and edited by Thomas Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 151. Translation modified.

¹¹⁰ Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters*, 151. Translation modified.

¹¹¹ Martin Heidegger, “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry,” *Existence and Being*, 285. Translation modified.

¹¹² *Poèmes de la folie de Hölderlin*, trans. Pierre Jean Jouve with Pierre Klossowski (Paris: Fourcade, 1930), rpd in Pierre Jean Jouve, *Oeuvres*, II (Paris: Mercure de France, 1987).

¹¹³ “The poems which follow are not a translation of selected poems of Hölderlin, but a free adaptation, introduced and linked together by entirely original poems. The whole constitutes what may perhaps be regarded as a persona.” David Gascoyne, “Introduction,” *Hölderlin’s Madness* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1938), 14.

as a means of access to “the secret world to which the poet penetrates.”¹¹⁴ See, for example, Gascoyne’s rendition of the fragment “An” which, partly following Jouve’s French rendering as “A (Diotima),” is given the English title, “To the Beloved (Diotima)”:

I would sing of thee
But only tears
And in the night in which I walk I see extinguish thy
Clear eyes!
O sprit of the Sky.¹¹⁵

Or hear the rendition of cloud language:

Often the inner world is closed and full of clouds,
Man’s mind perturbed and full of doubt.¹¹⁶

In his “Introduction,” Gascoyne observed the role of night and sunlight in Hölderlin’s poetry, especially the poetry of the period of his madness, making of Hölderlin one of the poets who are “philosophers of nostalgia and the night. A disturbed night, whose paths lead far among forgotten things, mysterious dreams and madness. And yet a night that precedes the dawn, and is full of longing for the sun. These poets look forward out of their night; and Hölderlin in his madness wrote always of sunlight and dazzling air, and the islands of the Mediterranean noon.”¹¹⁷ Here, in his own poem “Tenebrae,” is how Gascoyne presents this imbrication of night and sunlight, “the endless night” of collapse and emergence,

The passing of the immaterial world in the deep eyes.

The granite organ in the crypt

¹¹⁴ David Gascoyne, “Introduction,” *Hölderlin’s Madness*, 11.

¹¹⁵ David Gascoyne, “To the Beloved (Diotima),” *Hölderlin’s Madness*, 36; cf. Friedrich Hölderlin, “An,” in *Pläne und Bruchstücke, Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 2, 321.

¹¹⁶ What David Gascoyne here translates as “Perspectives,” *Hölderlin’s Madness*, 46 are two fragments in the manuscripts of Hölderlin titled “Aussicht,” and “Die Aussicht,” in Friedrich Hölderlin, *Pläne und Bruchstücke, Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 2, 292. Gascoyne also clearly draws upon Jouve’s version of “Aussicht” as “Vue,” in *Poèmes de la folie de Hölderlin, in Oeuvres*, II, 1999.

¹¹⁷ David Gascoyne, “Introduction,” *Hölderlin’s Madness*, 2.

Resounds with rising thunder through the blood
 With daylight song, unearthly song that floods
 The brain with bursting suns:
 Yet it is night.

It is the endless night.¹¹⁸

It is this language, highlighted by Heidegger and the culture of Surrealism alike, of darkness in daylight – of light that dazes – that Prynne’s poetry will resume and resituate in terms of a neurologically conditioned articulation of the zone of the in-between,¹¹⁹ for example in *The Oval Window’s* rendition of the journey:

¹¹⁸ David Gascoyne, “Tenebrae,” *Hölderlin’s Madness*, 41.

¹¹⁹ The presence of fire, sun and light imagery in Prynne’s work is so well-established as to be a reflex. Consider, for example, the following epigraph to the original publication of *Aristeas*, but which was not included in *The White Stones* where the poems of *Aristeas* were collected:

‘He saw a fire infolding itself, and brightness about it; and that the fire also was bright; and that out of it went forth lightning; that the likeness of the firmament upon the living creatures, was the colour of the terrible crystal.’ John Bunyan, *The Holy City; or, The New Jerusalem*.

(J.H. Prynne, epigraph, *Aristeas* (London: Ferry Press, 1968), 3.)

Consider, too, the following passage from *The English Intelligencer*:

The runic *wym* is thus the fulfilled sign of joy, separation from which is the exile or distance of hope, desire, love; all the projective excursions of motive which converge in longing and (so they say) arrive ultimately in the beautiful recourse of the blessed. This is clearly the intent of the runes in the OE *Husband’s Message*, the power of promise and covenant to release the attainment of feeling; the glyphic message has been expounded as: “Follow the *sun’s path* (sigel-rā) south across the *ocean* (ǣr), to find *joy* (wyn) with the *man* (mon) who is waiting for you” (Elliott, *Runes*, p.73; the whole poem is given in OE and Mod E translation in W.S. Mackie, ed., *The Exeter Book*, Part II, E.E.T.S. 1934). Or, with a less *narrative* sense of longing, the runes can bind across distance, to empower and complete what they describe.

In darkness by day we must press on,
giddy at the tilt of a negative crystal
(*The Oval Window*, 33 / 338)

and where the negative is marked by regression and failure of speech at a subliminal level (“almost below speech”): “The toy is childish, almost below speech” (*The Oval Window*, 33 / 338), which condition necessitates the terms of simple plea, again from *Day Light Songs*:

The whole cloud is bright
& assembled now
we are drawn by simple
plea over
the membrane and its
folded parts
into the point, and touch the

(J.H. Prynne, “A Pedantic Note in Two Parts,” *The English Intelligencer*, 2nd series, (June 1967), 352.)

As a final example of the prevalence of this sensibility, consider the epigraph for *To Pollen* drawn from *Gilgamesh*:

*Let my eyes see the sun and be sated with light.
The darkness is hidden, how much light is there left?
When may the dead see the rays of the sun?*

Gilgamesh, Si I 13' – 15'

(J.H. Prynne, *To Pollen* (London: Barque Press, 2007), 3.)

It may be suggested that the Prynnean poetic as it has developed since 1967 has been to explore the means and conditions of *binding* with a less narrative sense. To read Prynne's etymological reflections in *The English Intelligencer*, which journal must be seen as a laboratory of ideas in the way the great avant-garde journals such as *La Révolution surréaliste*, or *Documents* or *L'Ephémère* functioned for earlier generations, is to see at a glance why the encounter with Hölderlin was unavoidable. In all the talk of Olson and Dorn, we have missed the role of Hölderlin and the way that Hölderlin enables a connection to Blake, Wordsworth, and Celan, and subsequently Andrea Zanzotto. Prynne, in other words, as a European poet.

air streaming away

(Poems, 31)

the terms of which poem, shaped by the visual scansion, the spaced writing of Hölderlin's fragments grasped as a form of composition in the field,¹²⁰ now function in new registers of neurology, beginning with the image of topology implied by "the membrane and its / folded parts / into the point," that is, point as image of infinite density, as image of place – the imbrication of differing temporalities – so that membrane and point together figure the question of place precisely there where the inner cloud (or "the inner world [...] full of clouds"¹²¹) is the mark of collapse, of loss of (ordinary) consciousness – Hughlings Jackson's defective consciousness. This signals the condition in which negative experience, below the negative echo line, assumes the directive and

we are drawn by simple
plea

from within that condition / state, that "strange place," that "strange country" shadowed by "clouds of colour," and which, says Hughlings Jackson, "are supposed to be developments in a brutal way of the motor and sensory elements in the anatomical substrata of visual ideas."¹²² The experience of Lenz, of the momentary, acoustic phases of consciousness depicted in "Again in the Black Cloud," even the migraines of a Hildegard of Bingen as reported by the neurologist Oliver Sacks,¹²³ are states in which the neurology of heightened states will be indiscernible from the neurology of collapse – they will, in the language of this commentary, be equivalent descriptions – and *mutatis*

¹²⁰ The works which most directly bear the prosodic inflection of the spaced writing and visual scansion of Hölderlin's *Bruchstücke* (fragments) are *Day Light Songs, Voll Verdienst, A Night Square* (1971), and the poem "As grazing the earth....," 1973, collected in *Wound Response*.

¹²¹ David Gascoyne, "Perspectives," *Hölderlin's Madness*, 46.

¹²² Hughlings Jackson, "On the Scientific and Empirical Investigation of Epilepsies," 185.

¹²³ Cf. Oliver Sacks, "The Visions of Hildegard," *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat, and Other Clinical Tales* (New York: Summit Books, 1985), 158-162.

mutandis for the experience of an inner or external spatiality, which may well be fictions of social ordering. (Prynne, it must be noted, has always been sensitive to this dimension of pure fiction in the work of Stevens and how, at times, it falls into narcissism – the type of which is “The Snow Man.” But a poem such as “Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself” captures to perfection the pivot on a threshold where sound and sun are the privileged figures of indiscernables.¹²⁴) Where Gascoyne, passing, it must be said, from Surrealism to a neo-Romantic idiom, will write (through Hölderlin) of

This severed artery
The sand-obliterated face [...]

¹²⁴ See Wallace Stevens, “Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself”:

At the earliest ending of winter,
In March, a scrawny cry from the outside
Seemed like a sound in his mind.

He knew that he heard it,
A bird’s cry, at daylight or before,
In the early March wind.

The sun was rising at six,
No longer a battered panache above the snow ...
It would have been outside.

It was not from the vast ventriloquism
Of sleep’s faded papier-mâché ...
The sun was coming from outside.

That scrawny cry – it was
A chorister whose c preceded the choir.
It was part of the colossal sun,

Surrounded by its choral rings,
Still far away. It was like
A new knowledge of reality.

Wallace Stevens, “Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself,” *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, 534.

Explosions of every dimension
Directions run away
Towards the sun [...]
The black sun in his blood¹²⁵

the opening poem of Pynne's *Into the Day*, in an imaginal language drawing upon Hölderlin, Celan and, especially, Trakl, will announce vigorously, in a clipped rhythm which, in its use of consonance and caesura, seems to evoke a pre-Romance English prosody,¹²⁶ that

Blood fails the ear, trips the bird's
fear of bright blue,

before closing:

Blood then barred
from the brain, sun in the sky, what's
lost is the hour spoken by heart.

(*Into the Day*, n.p. / *Poems*, 202)

¹²⁵ David Gascoyne, "Epilogue," *Hölderlin's Madness*, 47.

¹²⁶ *Into the Day*, with *Day Light Songs*, *Fire Lizard* (1970) and *A Night Square* (composed 1971, published 1973) form a diurnal sequence the language of which, dominated by the visionary landscape and the relation between joy and field, I think can be shown to have been shaped in the laboratory of *The English Intelligencer*, and so shaped at the time that the language of Hölderlin was becoming part of Pynne's emerging poetics in tandem with his investigations of English and Germanic etymology as *reserves* of poetic and phonic potency.

Fig. 3. *Into the Day*, 1972. Front cover, frontispiece, two internal illustrations, *achevé d'imprimer* 1972 and back cover



Fig. 3.1

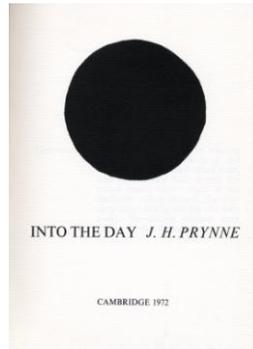


Fig. 3.2

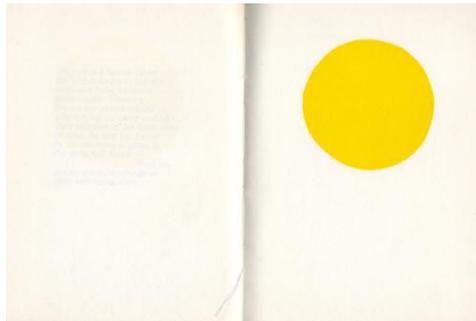


Fig. 3.3

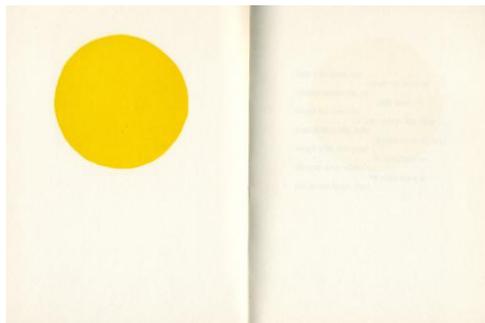


Fig. 3.4

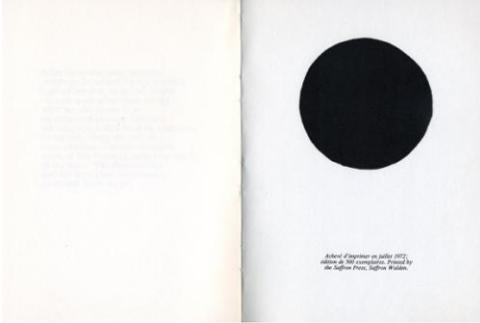


Fig. 3.5



Fig. 3.6

The difference between the language of *Into the Day* and *Hölderlin's Madness* is the role of neurology: the threshold phenomenon is triggered by a neurological collapse such that the “sun in the sky” (fig. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6) will never be something that without any epistemological doubt can be situated beyond the brain or, in a diction inflected by Celan, by retrieving the affect for “the hour spoken by heart.”¹²⁷ The liminal condition is the condition of being, there where “Only at the rim does the day tremble and shine.” (*WR* 12 /223) It is in this light, then, that one might be able to understand the difference in the attitude toward science and scientific languages on the part of Prynne in comparison with Heidegger, which will point to a different materiality, that is, a different conception of mediation, and evaluation of the field or zone of the in-between; in this light, too, that one might understand, from “Again in the Black Cloud,” that at the moment at which “Damage makes perfect” the language of neurology again becomes operative in its description of the non-egocentric subjection of the *Zwischenbereich* as *field* of sleep:

“reduced cerebral blood flow and oxygen utilisation
are manifested by an increase in slow frequency waves,
a decrease in alpha-wave activity, an increase in

¹²⁷ The yellow and black disks of *Into the Day* (fig. 3.1 to 3.6) can be interpreted in terms of the fact that in our universe of discourse the human eye is configured to be most effective in yellow light, that is, the light of our sun. In terms of the iconography of the poem, see the poem beginning “Occulted by the great disk,” *Into the Day*, in *Poems*, 212.

beta-waves, the appearance of paroxysmal potentials.”

There can be little doubt about the language being deployed. As *Damage makes perfect* it introduces – through the colon – its continuity with the language of the neurology of the zone of sleep through which is manifested the phenomenon of the disorganization of the field of consciousness. Consider the following relatively straightforward explanation from J.F. Stein for beta waves and alpha waves in the neurophysiology of sleep:

an alert subject performing strenuous mental arithmetic shows small (around 20 μ V) randomly occurring potential fluctuations of EEG, averaging between 15 and 30 per second, known as *beta* (β) waves [fig. 4]. These are said to be *desynchronized* by comparison with *alpha* (α) waves which occur when the subject relaxes and closes his eyes.¹²⁸

Consider, for the purpose of comparison, the body as it enters a stage or state of relaxation, of which sleep is a type, or, say, certain states induced through yoga (that is, feedback), or hibernation, there is indeed reduced “oxygen utilization”; but the language of “Again in the Black Cloud” points to “the appearance of paroxysmal potentials” with an increase in beta-waves which will be followed by (massive) synchronization. As Henry Ey observes: “Whereas the mass of cerebral neurons pulsate partially and in succession, massive ‘synchronization’ forms the essence of the epileptic state. This state is expressed by two fundamental phenomena: convulsions and loss of consciousness.”¹²⁹ Now let us consider the way in which Ey puts the neurophysiological material in phenomenological and epistemological terms to explain the significance of the destructuring of the field of consciousness in the zone of sleep:

¹²⁸ J.F. Stein, “Sleep, EEG, Reticular System,” *An Introduction to Neurophysiology* (Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1982), 301. Thanks are here due to Ms. (now Dr.) Jessica Ruth Harris, sometime medical student in Gonville and Caius College, who suggested Stein as a guide.

¹²⁹ Henri Ey, “The Neurobiology of the Field of Consciousness,” *Consciousness*, 182.

Everything takes place as if sleeping and waking were not simple states, but involved an unfolding of events which was regulated by the process of organization, disorganization, and reorganization of the brain. When the individual stops organizing his field of consciousness in its verticality and the facultativity of the movements which allow him to adapt to reality, he vacillates in sleep. In sleep he can abandon himself to the annihilation of a world, where a dream, as an instantaneous flux, appears only to disappear; or can again set himself up as an “analogue” of the world. It thus seems that the brain itself “overturns” its own organization [setting itself off from] the order of “worldly” time and space.¹³⁰

It is precisely the deconstruction of the levels of hierarchy inherent in the intentional activity of consciousness that “Again in the Black Cloud” depicts in order, then, to become open to the neurological field as model of autonomy, there where “Damage makes perfect,” on the threshold of paroxysmal potentials, of neurological crisis – a *grand mal* attack. “Damage makes perfect:” and the colon introduces the direct quotation as though the ensuing description would explain, as though forming a seam between “perfect” and what follows. What, though, could perfection be? What is lost in order that there may be another kind of gain, the spending of which will be “damage mended / and ended”? (*WR* 21 / 231) There is suggestion from Ey which may assist here when he comments that “The lived experience of dreaming during sleep is the reverse of the real and, as E.C. Crosby pointed out, is the reverse of emotional expression. It unfolds in a closed and imaginary space ‘outside the law’ and in a sort of gratification of pure emotion.”¹³¹

At which point, the parallelism (of discourse, of the subject, of the *Zwischenbereich*, of time, of experience) inherent in “Again in the Black Cloud” takes on a new significance with hints of temporal/topographical regression pointing to *hallucination*:

¹³⁰ Henri Ey, “The Neurobiology of the Field of Consciousness,” *Consciousness*, 181.

¹³¹ Henry Ey, “The Neurobiology of the Field of Consciousness,” *Consciousness*, 194.

the reverse signs of memory and dream

and the implied dissolution of secondary psychological processes for the directing of cathexes of ‘attention’ onto the external world, hence:

And constantly the
child line dips into sleep, the
more than countably infinite hierarchy of
higher degree causality conditions
setting the reverse signs of memory and dream.
“Totally confused most of the time” –is
the spending of gain
or damage mended
and ended, aged, the
shouts in the rain

and we are returned, again, to the synaesthetic states of the vocal world (“the / shouts in the rain”) both in *Day Light Songs* (“ the shouts are / against nothing we all / stand at variance / we walk slowly if it / hurts we rant,” *Poems*, 29) and the opening of “Again in the Black Cloud”: “Falling loose with a grateful hold, / of the sounds towards purple,” the implied “aimless wandering,” and “dizziness” now related to “Totally confused most of the time,”¹³² with the implied rapid saccadic rhythms of movement into and out of, below and above, mimicking the various layers of sleep (primitive sleep, hypnagogia) or the breaks in and out of awareness of defective consciousness of which epilepsy, on Hughlings Jackson’s model, is the type. As Ey, the great modern disciple of Hughlings Jackson comments, “Epilepsy makes it exceptionally clear that the state of unconsciousness is no more a simple and homogeneous state than is wakefulness or sleep. Unconsciousness admits of a series of levels of loss of structure, which epilepsy brings to light.”¹³³ The poem seems to be over-boarded with the densities, pressures and impacts of

¹³² Cf. Ey’s extended description on “the twilight states, auras, and attacks of psychomotor automatisms which occur,” along with “the electrical ‘conflagration’” and “cerebral hurricane and paroxysmal hypersynchrony” in epilepsy just short of psychological dissolution, in “The Neurobiology of the Field of Consciousness,” *Consciousness*, 182-183.

¹³³ Henry Ey, “The Neurobiology of the Field of Consciousness,” *Consciousness*, 187.

change, movement and threshold phenomena in such a manner that awareness would seem to be not the containment of a subject but rather the articulation of an autonomously structured field of process, motion and powers.

Here we return to the theme of liminality and the precision which we made that the domain presented here is that of the representation of the experience of electrical charges across the synapses, for we can observe, not only the intrinsic link between syntax and movement and color. The color predicates not only open into a given literary history, but become the means through which the concern with *equivalent descriptions* (at the heart of this poem) is embodied: color-consciousness; color conceived as particle-wave; color as richness so full as to be debilitating (as deployed, for example, in Valéry's great sonnet "Le bois amical" which renders the drunkenness of being as "La Lune amicale aux insensées"); color in the field as *without measure*. In some respects, it is as though the thinking of the poem dismisses – *congédie* – the problem of ventriloquism in favor of a more radical approach to process, for if, in relation to the representation of "Again in the Black Cloud," it were asked: "What is the *source* for the voice in action?" it would have to be said that no answer could be forthcoming. The question leads to the question of the absence of subject. Actions (not persons) seem to occupy the grammatical position of *active* voice:

"Shouts rise again", "flecks of cloud skim over to storm-light"

and we are not provided with any stabilizing of vision or framework of enunciation which would master the experience, especially where animation, active voice is given to "the white bees" which "swarm out of the open voice gap." What a moment of almost cold, lyric beauty, a beauty of stasis, fit for a Magritte: *the open voice gap*. Again "the hour / is crazed *by* fracture," not that the hour itself fractures. And when the position of active voice is assumed by a pronoun that could passably be that of personhood, it is only to enter a question, the sphere of the problematic –

Who *can* see what he loves,
 again or before, as the injury shears
 past the curve of recall, the field
 double-valued at the divine point.

This is apophatic expression, negative capability. Who, indeed, can see, observe, make tangible, that which is constitutive of his utmost nature . . .? where “the field / [becomes] double-valued at the divine point”: this reflexive moment, or rather, the *implied* impossibility of this reflexive moment being capable of becoming an object of attention, nevertheless, defines: something of the nature of value: the double-value spoken of here could, I suggest, tie into the double-value of quantum physics already alluded to in the expression “equivalent description” whereby some ‘x’ can be described either as a particle or as a wave without, and this is the crucial point, being able to be any the wiser about ontological commitment. This double-value is, too, the double-value of the synaesthesia of cross-matching modalities, where physical movement can be color in “Falling loose with a grateful hold / of the sounds towards purple,” where sound can be taste (as in the onset of epilepsy), or even where a defective capacity or consciousness can be an opening (“this cross-/matching of impaired attention” as “a pure joy,” (*WR* 21 / 231). It is, too, the double-valued “equivalent descriptions” of (i) medical discourse and (ii) the experience of the subject of that medical discourse. No doubt I *could* describe *my* experience of heart-attack or epileptic discharge in medico-technical terms (Hughlings Jackson’s *Z* was after all a young medical doctor), however unlikely.

This is where the Heideggerians say that we are here presented with a language of science as an abstraction practiced upon the body (conceived by science as neural matter, hyle), the treatment of a subject reduced to a condition of oppressive *potentiality*, being no more than a *potential subject* of technological discourse - “the violence of abstraction” and “the abstraction of violence” in Heideggerian discourse.¹³⁴

Given the prevalence (dominance?) of passive voice construction in “Again in the Black Cloud” and *Wound Response*, one might ask, what are the means by which, what are the grounds on which, a reconnection could be made with the activity of the subject

¹³⁴ Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, ed. Medard Boss (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 19-20, and which may be compared with Bergson’s account of Greek science and place (*lieu, khora*) in Aristotle in comparison with the concept of space in modern science as founded by Galileo. Cf. Henri Bergson, *L’Evolution créatrice* (1907) (Paris: PUF, 1966), 328-331.

such that we have movement (kinesis) as well as change (metabolé)? This is the question, the key question, it can be said, upon which the discussions of *Touch, Heat and Pain* land and which is central to “Of Movement Towards a Natural Place” where, quoting *Touch, Heat and Pain*, the question is formulated in terms of

“a
detecting mechanism must integrate across that
population.”

Here is the context in which the statement appears in the discussions of *Touch, Heat and Pain*. The passage quoted in “Of Movement Towards a Natural Place” appears in the “General Discussion of Section IV” of *Touch, Heat and Pain* devoted to “Central Integration over Neural Space” (*Touch, Heat and Pain*, 291-296). V.B. Mountcastle opens the discussion with the following question:

I would like to put a theoretical question to the experts on temperature. Let us consider the central detecting mechanism looking at the input from the different fibres. How do you conceive that the central mechanism reads the precise temperature when frequencies may be identical at two different temperatures, on such a *double-ended* curve [...]? One hypothesis is that it is a spatial affair and the detector discriminates neurons distributed in neural space which when integrated signal warmth, *but this makes it much more complicated for the central mechanism.*
(*Touch, Heat and Pain*, 291. My emphases.)

The question is nominally about temperature, its nociception, but is implicitly about agency and the role or otherwise of a subject’s response to pain. To Mountcastle’s question, Hensel replies that “In a large population of, say, cold fibres, the curve of increasing total frequency is extended to much lower temperatures. In this case the integrated response of the whole population of cold receptors rises until quite a low temperature is reached and then falls off rapidly.” (*Touch, Heat and Pain*, 291.) If there is not a “reciprocally oriented integrated response for warmth,” then, says Mountcastle, “This opens up the more difficult question of how the central neural detecting mechanism integrates across neural space.” (*Touch, Heat and Pain*, 291.) Zotterman interjects the telling question to Hensel, asking him

“are you sure [...] that the integrated response *has anything to do with what we experience*, because it is a low frequency? It may be that we experience only the phasic (dynamic) *response*.” (*Touch, Heat and Pain*, 291. My emphases.) The distinguished neuroscientist Sir John Eccles was also a member of the discussion throughout *Touch, Heat and Pain*, and at this point in the debate he asks: “Professor Mountcastle, what exactly do you mean by neural space?” (*Touch, Heat and Pain*, 292) which receives the answer (drawn upon by “Of Movement Towards a Natural Place”):

By this I mean that neural transformation of real space which may be identical with it or may be some topologically preserved transform of it. For example, if the arm is stimulated, there must be a distribution of neurons within the arm area of the cortex which represents the space of that arm. In order to integrate the input from this area and read its temperature, a detecting mechanism must integrate across that population, as Professor Hensel suggests, and that is not an easy matter for which to suggest a reasonable model.

(*Touch, Heat and Pain*, 292.)

Eccles seeks to make the case that when there is talk of “warm” and “cold” fibres at some point there must also be talk of what is “actually experienced” (*Touch, Heat and Pain*, 292), in terms of temporal delays of approximately, say, one-fifth of a second. Mountcastle insists, however, that

There *is* a mystery in the case of temperature sensation, because to derive intensity in this case, spatial integration is necessary, whereas for many other forms of sensation, where there are monotonic curves, it is not. By looking at the input from one part of the neural field you could not tell what the temperature is. This is not true for many other forms of sensation.

(*Touch, Heat and Pain*, 292-93.)

As the questions become more basic, more fundamental – “Surely, says Professor Gray, this is not a fundamental problem” (*Touch, Heat and Pain*, 293) – the responses become curiously telling in their simplicity: “No one, says, Mountcastle, knows anything about how

populations of neurons integrate spatially”; and Zotterman, in turn, returns to the basic, “How do we judge temperature?” (*Touch, Heat and Pain*, 293) in order to demonstrate the relativity of temperature – and by implication what has been called the puzzle of pain.¹³⁵ There is, indeed, humor in this kind of conference talk when seen on the page, and some of this passes over quietly into the ironism at work in “Of Movement Towards a Natural Place,” and which comes to the fore in “The *Plant Time Manifold* Transcripts.” It remains, though, that the questions of agency, nociception (cognition at the neural level), place and language are important fundamental questions and are so taken by Prynne as models. The problem, for example, of a central detecting mechanism that integrates across neural space can be understood, and, on the argument of this commentary, is so understood in the poetry of Prynne, as posing the problem of an internal mechanism which may be capable of some kind of intelligence, and which, furthermore, as part of and yet in some way apart form a large neural network may be understood not merely as a means by which sensation is registered but as itself a form of communication the form of which is the CNS. Why, then, might one not be able to construe such a central detecting mechanism, self-reproducing and self-organizing – the very definition of autonomy, even within a hierarchical model of autonomy such as found in the work of an *Ey* – as a form of non-linguistic communication? And if this central detecting mechanism that integrates across populations of neural space is itself the material basis for the internal representation of self-observation so characteristic of certain states like hypnagogia, or the sense of separated and doubling awareness – “See him recall the day by moral trace,” opens “Of Movement Toward a Natural Place,” and “He sees his left wrist rise to tell him the time”? For not the least significant aspect of the discussion in *Touch, Heat and Pain*, especially that between Mountcastle and Eccles, is that even within neural networks there is a need for representation – not merely information – that is, some kind of second-order activity. Let’s look again at Mountcastle’s response to Eccles’ question “What do you mean by neural space?”

¹³⁵ Cf. Ronald Melzack, *The Puzzle of Pain* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), but also the pioneering book by Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: OUP, 1985).

By this I mean that neural transformation of real space which may be identical with it or may be some topologically preserved transform of it. For example, if the arm is stimulated, there must be a distribution of neurons within the arm area of the cortex which represents the space of that arm.

(*Touch, Heat and Pain*, 292.)

There could be no clearer expression of the role of representation – and in part for the poetics of *Wound Response*, the role of language – at the smallest levels, there where the field of the human opens onto non-human but sentient presence. Here we might also be enabled to understand the design of the cover of *Wound Response* (fig.1) in relation to the discourse of pain and varying thresholds explored in *Touch, Heat and Pain* (fig.2) where the rectangular block of *Wound Response* (fig.) evokes the rectangular block of (fig.2) and its quantitative function of marking and registering a pain threshold (in particular in relation to the skin, but this latter is not the main or exclusive point for *Wound Response*). The explanation of the diagram from *Touch, Heat and Pain* reads: “Relative concentrations of P, P* and Pn in the steady state at different tissue temperatures. ‘Pain threshold’ refers to the relative concentration of P* for steady non-adapting pain.” (J.D. Hardy and J.A.J. Stolwijk, “Tissue Temperature and Thermal Pain,” in *Touch, Heat and Pain*, 44.) The constants, P and P*, are, however, inferred and stand for “the relative concentrations of some natural ‘inactivated’ protein complex.” (Hardy and Stolwijk, in *Touch, Heat and Pain*, 40.) This is the obscurity of which W. Ritchie Russell spoke in his contemporaneous review of the Ciba Foundation conference and accompanying volume, where fundamental questions lead to the need for new formulations and languages for the purposes of representation. It is at this level of questioning, gathered together in the conception of place as neural space, that the neurological field and the poetic field are conjoined in “The relation between ‘joy’ and ‘field’ as they resolve into the idea of *paradise*.”¹³⁶ *Wound Response*, that is to say, is the occasion in Prynne’s *oeuvre* where, going forward, the conception of the poetic field was definitively re-structured in terms of and by the neurological field as *model*, above all, as model of

¹³⁶ J.H. Prynne, “A Pedantic Note in Two Parts,” *The English Intelligencer*, 2nd series, (c. June 1967), 350.

autonomy in which passivity is accorded an epistemologically pivotal role.

The question of agency figured in neurological terms gives a deep temporality of nature/cosmos, one that poses the question in terms of a non-intentional universe, and this is the conception of autonomy at which *Wound Response* aims: to say that it would be impossible to say or know what such a discourse might be like is not the point. Suppose, rather, that one permitted one's discourse to be thus regulated, what *models* might there be from which to choose? First, the language of quantum physics, what we have already alluded to as the language of *equivalent descriptions* of which the wave-particle construction is but a paradigm. We do not, though, have to go as far as such abstruse fictions as are to be formed in quantum physics, closer to home, closer, indeed, to one's self, is the experience of the body *under certain types of description* – thus, the autonomous nervous system, the genesis, development and circulation of disease, or, as we have studied here, neurological damage or heightened states as explored in Hölderlin, Büchner, Trakl, Celan, and Prynne. A limiting case might be to observe the effect of feedback (Yoga, for example) on the autonomous nervous system to that point where suggestion/intention fails giving experience over to a *curious* dualism (of equivalent descriptions): the body moving as through without a subject, yet a “subject” being able to cognize such movement as a passive spectator, indeed, a subject which, at a given point will *converge* with the moving autonomy of this *inside* experience, the limiting case of which would be the re-cognition of the approach of one's own death. That is, where in the one all is happening, effect, the subject's convergence with this happening is also itself an effect. In each of these forms subjectivity is radically reduced almost to a zero point condition – consider, again, Ey's allusion to E.C. Crosby on the lived experience of dreaming during sleep as *the reverse of emotional experience* - a condition for changes in modes of attention for the emergence of the new through attention (whence the language of surprise and “pure joy”). To a zero point condition. Is this an inhuman discourse, part of the much trumpeted destruction of the ‘subject’ of which postmodernism once saw itself as the celebration? I think not. It *is* part of an essay in a non-human discourse, and as such Prynne's poetics cannot possibly be comprehended in humanistic terms. I allow myself to recount the following exchange from many years ago with Prynne in his rooms in Gonville and Caius. Prynne spoke of attending Elizabeth Anscombe's inaugural professorial

lecture at Trinity, Cambridge - the author of the very important work on *Intention* (1957) - in which she floated the possibility, and meaningfulness, of a universe of non-intentional discourse, at which point, said Prynne, his ears pricked up and he began to listen, well, intently, only to hear Anscombe blow off the suggestion as something about which one could not easily meaningfully speak. In *Wound Response*, it is by no means obvious that the language of science is merely the objectifying methodology that Heidegger says it is, though the language of objectification is indeed explored in Prynne's *oeuvre* for the question of what such a discourse might be like if regulated however tenuously by the idea of a non-intentional universe which finds its models not merely in scientific discourse, but closest to discourse of the body. In this respect Prynne (and Breton, I should also argue, as understood by a Blanchot) in his exploration of passivity explores the non-human at the point where human subjection coincides and overlaps with non-human temporalities: language, natures, cosmos encountered through the fascinating hinterland of neurology: for its spontaneity, for its materiality, yet the impossibility of reductivist explanation which leaves open the metaphoric projective potency inherent to the human mind and language, and thereby, it can be argued, the juncture of immanence and transcendence without the need for ontological commitment. That point is reached, then, where obscurity is constructive, "the field / double-valued at the divine point." That point wherein the strictest language of science (mathematical quantum physics) fails in its desire/ability to ascribe ontological commitment,¹³⁷ where the germinal matrix of molecular biology is a paradigm case of potentiality (of which the current metaphorical usage of *khora* may be no more than an image), or wherein the language of medicine fails to touch the *self-experience* of pathological failure, that point

–out in the
snow-fields the aimless beasts
mean what they do, so completely the shout
is dichroic in gratitude,
half-silvered,

¹³⁷ Though increasingly, physicists are coming to think of the particles and processes of the sub-atomic world as fictions.

where, that is, poetic experience and poetic language are now made subject to the phenomenology of *transition*, *passage*, the lyric field as *Zwischenbereich*. At the very moment where poetic experience would herald dissolution, this work seems to be saying, there *begins* the *problem of subjection* (the medium of passage/transition), at the point where the problem of agency comes forward, there, and only there, suggest the poetics of *Wound Response*, can the question of imagining the emergence of the new be intelligible, and with it the struggle for the language of intelligibility – for this, the temporality of the body as the middle term in the open, the field of the Between, between human subjectness and nature, nature and the cosmos, is the starting place for the comprehension of the way in which the new, that is, intelligibility – fiction – is generated in the asymptotic mirror of the old, *La joie de se trouver devant une chose neuve*, “a pure joy at a feeble joke.” Reality as process and play.

Beyond help it is a joy at death itself:
a toy hard to bear, laughing all night.

The Oval Window, 34 / 339.

After feints the heart steadies,
pointwise invariant, by the drown'd
light of her fire. In the set course
we pass layer after layer, loving
what we still know. It is
an estranged passion, but true,
the daughter willed back by blue eyes,
unscathed, down the central
pathway. Timelike delirium
cools at this crossing, with your head
in my arms. The ship steadies
and the bird also; from frenzy
to darker fields we go.

Into the Day, (closing / *Poems*, 214)

APPENDIX:

THE TIME OF THE SUBJECT IN THE NEUROLOGICAL FIELD
(II): A NOTE ON BRETON IN THE LIGHT OF PRYNNE

A part of my morning was spent conjugating a new tense of the verb *to be* – since a new tense of the verb *to be* had just been invented.

André Breton, “Rêve,” *Littérature*, nouvelle série,
no.7, 1 December, 1922

The two main shadows over the future tense

J.H. Prynne, *The Oval Window*¹³⁸

... for it is at the place [endroit] where man seems on the point of finishing that probably he begins. This luminous phrase, suggested to Maurice Maeterlinck by the study of the work of this exquisite Novalis, could be stamped out in letters on the standard [flag, *oriflamme*] of contemporary poetry.¹³⁹

I should like to make an extended comparison of Prynne’s poetics of experience with a particular aspect of Breton’s poetics of experience, the Breton who was a student in medical psychiatry and whose conception of Surreality owes much to the medical and neurological literature of his youth dealing with the aphasias (Charcot), mental automatism (Maury, Freud) and the autonomous *la parole intérieure* (Egger).¹⁴⁰ The Surrealist Breton might, with reason, be seen as in

¹³⁸ J.H. Prynne, *The Oval Window*, 11 / *Poems*, 316.

¹³⁹ Tancrède de Visan, “Maurice Maeterlinck et les images successives,” *L’Attitude du lyrisme contemporain* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1911), 97.

¹⁴⁰ In the very text, “Le Message automatique” (1933), in which Breton famously wrote that “L’histoire de l’écriture automatique dans le surréalisme serait, je ne crains pas de le dire, celle d’une infortune continue” [The history of automatic writing in Surrealism would be, I do not fear to say it, a continuous misfortune], Breton, as part of his persistent attempt to deepen the historical and theoretical conception of Surrealist automatic experience, would also give a detailed historiographic and critical review of the French and German literature on the pathology and psychophysiology of autonomous experience in relation to language, vision, and listening (*l’écoute surréaliste*). Cf. André Breton, “Le Message automatique,” *Oeuvres complètes*, volume II (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 375-392. Among the texts discussed by

some way a Romantic of the Jena mode, and this would not be wholly unfair, whilst Prynne, surely, would be more properly Baroque, that is, Bach rather than Novalis. (But let us not forget that Novalis wrote that great proto-Surrealist work *Monolog* that begins: “There is something mad in language ...”.) This could be argued, but there is a place where they may be seen thinking, and deeply meditating on a comparable problem: that problem is the nature of agency and the inner temporality of the subject, and the *place* is neurology mediated through nature, that is, the neurology of heightened states and the experience of liminality especially in relation to color predication.

Above, we concentrated upon Hughlings Jackson’s conception of epileptic discharge as an aspect of the *model* at work in “Again in the Black Cloud.” It is important to observe that the epileptic state is not a psychotic state – one of the dominant models for Surrealist writing and art production – it is, however, close to a family of *états secondaires* important to the Surrealists of which the hypnagogic state is the determinant example for Surrealism, the state *par excellence* which captures, visually, acoustically and verbally, the meaning of passivity, transition and passage for Surrealist experience and which also helps one to understand why the Surrealists could not meaningfully distinguish automatist from oneiric modes of articulation, for which it was their great aim to find a common source. The founding speech of Surrealism is the utterance *Il y a un homme coupé en deux par la fenêtre ...* (There is man cut in two by a window...) which came to Breton as he was falling asleep, i.e., in a hypnagogic state: image and word articulated in the absence of sound, but not, as Breton reported, bereft of the murmur. Breton gives a first public account of the condition which led to this utterance in “Entrée des médiums” first published in the new series of *Littérature* in 1922:

In 1919, my attention was fixed upon – [literally, had affixed itself, become fixed upon] – phrases more or less partial which, in complete solitude, at the approach of

Breton, especially relevant to this study are Victor Egger, *La Parole intérieure: Essai de psychologie descriptive* (Paris: Germer Baillièrre et Cie, 1881); Pierre Quercy, *Les Hallucinations* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1936), and Pierre Quercy, *L’Hallucination*, vol. I: *Philosophes et mystiques*, vol. II: *Etudes cliniques* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1930).

sleep, became palpable [perceptible] to the mind without for all that the mind being able to discover a precedent reason for them [...] It is later that Soupault and I dreamt of reproducing in us *the state where they became formed*.¹⁴¹

This passage is re-taken in the *Manifeste* in 1924, but with greater attention to the texture of the experience in which, about to fall asleep, says Breton,

I perceived fully articulated to such an extent that it was impossible to change a word of it, but abstracted, however, from the sound of all voice, a quite bizarre phrase [...] a phrase I would dare to say *which was knocking at the window-pane* [...] it was something like: “There is a man cut in two by the window.”¹⁴²

The utterance is famously unfinished, incomplete and, as it were, interrupted, and the lack intrinsic to this founding utterance - this instituting fragment - is structurally and typologically characteristic of the hypnagogic state, that state which the great nineteenth-century psychopathologist Alfred Maury described as *un état intermédiaire*, a state which places one “en présence d'une décomposition ou d'une *suspension* de la pensée voisine de la mort” (in the presence of a decomposition or of a suspension of thought bordering on [close to] death.)¹⁴³ The hypnagogic and the epileptic states may both be regarded as forms of hypnoid conditions in which the subject finds itself in a different if parallel causality from the actions it may observe the point of origin of which is not merely “outside” the subject but independent of the subject in another autonomous field of structuration. From Breton and the Surrealists through Samuel Beckett – with parallel developments in philosophy (Bergson, Cassirer, Merleau-Ponty), linguistics (Jakobsen), and history of philosophy (Canguilhem) – up to the work of Prynne, the problem of

¹⁴¹ Cf. André Breton, “Entrée des médiums” (1922), in *Les Pas perdus* (Paris: Gallimard, 1924), rpd. in *Oeuvres complètes*, I (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 274. My emphasis.

¹⁴² André Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme* (1924), in *Oeuvres complètes*, I, 324-325.

¹⁴³ André Maury, “De certains faits observés dans les rêves et dans l'état intermédiaire entre le sommeil et la veille,” *Annales médico-psychologiques*, vol. 3, (1857), 158. My emphasis.

an agency or autonomous structuration has been resituated from the cosmological dimension, where it was first situated by Romanticism, to language, and in particular to language mediated by the neurological field in such a way that language and attention – modes of attending, or the breakdown of the internal capacities of attention – became the terms of articulation for a poetics no longer merely about the craft of verse. Hence the turn to liminal examples – the hypnagogic, the epileptoid, the narcotic – but always negotiated in relation to language as itself a liminal phenomenon explored by the Surrealists in such a way as to seem to tear apart expression and representation – the articulations we call discursive formations – even as they are necessary moments (aspects, in the linguistic term) of an *act*: one is not superior to the other, though it can fairly be said that Surrealism was concerned more with the expressive moment of representation since failure at the discursive level necessarily pointed either to distortion (social and psychological) or to some aspect of the expressive medium as flawed (in the neurological sense, for example) which may then become paradigmatic for alternative modes of attention. Indeed, what is fascinating in the Surrealist valorization of psychosis is not the vulgarity “We should all be mad,” rather it is the realization that there obtains in such conditions alternative patterns of concept-formation and attending and thereby different forms of signification, for the articulation of which language is in some way determinant. Hence Freud, and Lacan following Freud, making *paranoia* and the use of language in paranoia, the transition, the middle term, between neurosis and psychosis proper. It is this emphasis upon the pathologically derived modes of attention that the poetics of Surrealist experience share with the medically inflected poetics of liminality explored in *Wound Response*. Consider, for example, that in the letters that the young medical intern Breton wrote to his fellow student, and soon to be doctor and Dadaist, Théodore Frankel after his encounter with Freud as reported in Régis’ *Précis de psychiatrie* and subsequently in Régis and Hesnard’s considerable book *La Psychoanalyse des névroses et des psychoses* (1914), it was precisely this dimension of the structuration of the attention that fascinated him in the cases of psychoses. Particularly revealing are some of the passages that Breton copies out of books which he is reading in order to convey his excitement to Fraenkel. The following passage, alluding to Pascal’s *La Démonce précoce* (1911), for example, deals with the importance of structuration by association:

The disturbances [or, disorders] in the association of ideas in dementia praecox patients are reducible to disturbances in the power of the cohesion of psychic elements. Often, in poetry, there are associations by assonances, by contrasts, etc., and stereotypes, but each word remains in harmony with the principle idea.¹⁴⁴

The power of internal cohesion is the faculty of attention; but, Breton seems to be saying, the diverse means of association in poetry provide many models of internal cohesion. To this extent, the experience of attention is not distinct from the figures and prosodic movements which structure poetry - but this is not, though, as it might appear, to say something distinctive about the craft of writing verse. It is, rather, a step in the direction of loosening the (energetic) relations between the notionally psychopathological and the normal; this Breton will do by first, as our references to the work of Hughlings Jackson show, through a critical attention to the lack of clear, unequivocal demarcation between consciousness and absence of consciousness, by scrutinizing the relations, at the level of desire, in *états secondaires* or intermediate states, between dream and waking life in which, it can be seen, the forms of attending are not in principle without their distinctive organization marked by logics of separation - though what may be different from the everyday world of reason and habit, and radically so, is the intensity of movement of attention as objects are brought in and out of focus of interest - the economy of the cathexes, in other words, or, in the language of *Wound Response*, that state wherein “We are bleached in sound as it burns by what / we desire” (*WR* 5 / 216). For Breton, in his developing theory of knowledge, as he himself terms it on many occasions, the experience of different forms of attention would be a prerequisite for what a change in form of life might be, whereas for Prynne, it is a means for investigating the limits of language and representation as part of a poetic epistemology of life.¹⁴⁵ The work of neurology was crucial for

¹⁴⁴ André Breton to Théodore Fraenkel, 27 September 1916, quoted in Marguerite Bonnet, *André Breton: Naissance de l'aventure surréaliste* (Paris: José Corti, 1975, 1988), 109.

¹⁴⁵ Here cf. Bergson, “the *theory of knowledge* and the *theory of life* appears to us inseparable from each other.” Henri Bergson, “Introduction,” *L'Évolution créatrice*, ix. Heidegger is undoubtedly important for Prynne's poetics, but for Prynne's thinking on science, it is less Heidegger than another tradition that

Breton's conceptualization of the movement of attention, but psychopathology provided something important in this direction in the concept of complexes, that is, repressed energy, and that to which it became attached in an internally coherent manner which provides a model of autonomous structuration which to the subject is resistant, opaque. If the experience of internal cohesion could be understood as a function of the energy of a repressed complex, then the way would be open to experiment intelligibly with the fluidity of attention in that space wherein attention affixes itself, what Freud would later conceptualize as hypercathexis: psychopathology would then be dissolved into a set of figures for or prosody of the movement of attention or, eventually, a pathology of everyday life and the forms of desire as attention opens onto the world - in other words, a movement in which the structure of lyric disposition served to make the world available to a sensibility of radical contingency, and nowhere is that sense of radical contingency more clearly shown than in the way in which Breton deploys the structure of passivity and the sense of accompaniment to a consciousness becoming liminal, but not wholly lost, characteristic of a whole range of *états secondaires*.

Drawing upon the neurological typology of excessive synaptic firing in heightened states - which, in a telling contrastive term, is often a *loss*, a *diminution* - Breton could write of such a state, such an *état secondaire*, that - whether epileptic, psychotic, or hypnagogic - it is a condition from which, on the Surrealist definition of the image, at the point of the seizing of two realities otherwise distant and dissimilar, there surges "une lumière particulière, *lumière de l'image*."¹⁴⁶

needs to be engaged, that tradition running through Bergson, Whitehead... and up to Rupert Sheldrake.

¹⁴⁶ André Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, I, 337. Breton's emphasis. The *lumière de l'image* recalls, too, the language of lightning from Hölderlin. Though the evidence is clear about the role of the culture of Surrealism in the wider introduction of Hölderlin into French thought (for example, the wife of Pierre Naville, Denise Naville, was the principal translator of Hölderlin's letters), many of the Surrealists, including Breton's first wife, Simone Kahn, were bi-lingual French-German from Strasbourg and Alsace-Lorraine. Maxime Alexandre, a typical example of this configuration, would write a fine book that testifies to the richness of this Strasbourg contingent within Surrealism. Cf. Maxime Alexandre, *Hölderlin le poète: étude critique suivie d'un Choix de Poèmes* (Marseille: Robert Laffont, 1942). Breton himself, in his *Entretiens*, would go so far as to say that Hölderlin, on whom

Breton here transposes the neurology of synaptic firing into a metaphoric of inspiration which is no longer the *element* of balance and purity that is the aim of a Pierre Reverdy's (Cubist-Constructivist) metapoetics of balance and conception of beauty. The value of the image, says Breton using metaphors of electricity, "depends on the beauty of the spark obtained; it is, as a result, a function of the potential difference between the two conductors." He continues:

And just as the length of the spark gains to the extent that it becomes produced through rarified gases, so the Surrealist atmosphere created by mechanical writing, that I have wanted to place at the disposition of all, is especially given to the production of the most beautiful images. It can even be said that the images appear, in this vertiginous race, as standard-bearers of the mind. [The mind] becomes aware of unlimited fields [des étendues illimitées¹⁴⁷] where desires become manifested, where for and against unceasingly become reduced, where its *obscurity* [my emphasis] does not betray it [...]. It is the most beautiful of nights, *the night of lightnings* [la nuit des éclairs]: Next to it, the day is night.¹⁴⁸

Heidegger had given a magisterial interpretation, formed the intimate link – the *trait d'union* – between Surrealism and Heideggerian thought: "I have already insisted on the possibilities of rapprochement of Surrealism with the thought of Heidegger on the level of myth. An intimate link [un trait d'union] exists: the work of Hölderlin, of which he has given a superior commentary." André Breton, *Entretiens* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952, rpd., 1969), 258. On this philosophical dimension of Surrealist experience, on Surrealism as the experience of thought, cf. Michael Stone-Richards, *The Negative Work of Culture: Breton, Blanchot and the Philosophical Intelligence of Surrealism* (forthcoming).

¹⁴⁷ *Des étendues illimitées*: in another context it can be shown that by this Breton intends something conceptually equivalent to the prepredicative presuppositions of logical experience. This is explored in a chapter on Breton, Blanchot and Derrida in my forthcoming *The Negative Work of Culture: Breton, Blanchot and the Philosophical Intelligence of Surrealism*.

¹⁴⁸ André Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, I, 338.

“La nuit des éclairs,” writes Breton, “light darting / over and over, through a clear sky,” we find in *Wound Response*. It has long been realized that in certain liminal conditions where color states predominate that a limiting-case had been reached in which it was not possible for a subject internally to distinguish the electrical firing of neurons from an outside that could be distinct from the interior apperception of the *effects* of firing neurons. (The anthropological literature on shamanistic displacement confirms a comparable disposition, but this is something that had long been known in Romanticism, particularly where Romanticism, as with Coleridge or Büchner, contemporary medicine is called upon in literary contexts.) In the famous scene in Büchner’s *Lenz* which we have already quoted this is the precise source of the power of the experience as Lenz finds himself confronted with a storm (an excessive neuronc firing whose disposition is such that we cannot say what is breakdown what is a heightened state) in which

the sun’s rays shone through, drawing their glittering swords across the snowy slopes, so that a blinding light sliced downward from the peak to the valley; or when the stormwind blew the clouds down and away, tearing into them a pale blue lake of sky, until the wind abated and a humming sound like a lullaby or the ringing of bells floated upwards from the gorges far below and from the tops of the fir trees, and a gentle red crept across the deep blue, and tiny clouds drifted past on silver wings, and all the peaks shone and glistened sharp and clear far across the landscape; [...] at such moments [...] he felt as though he would have to suck up the storm and receive it within him.¹⁴⁹

It is in relation to such force, such psychic violence, that the mind, on Breton’s account, is passive, whilst for the Prynne of “Again in the Black Cloud,” the passivity of the mind is a condition of the experience: the vertiginous aspect of which Breton speaks finds its counterpart in the neurology of epilepsy and *états secondaires*; the sense of the infinite (the Kantian sublime) – which Breton terms, following

¹⁴⁹ Georg Büchner, *Lenz*, 249-250.

Maury, *des étendues illimitées*¹⁵⁰ - pressing in, available, that is, derived from the more phenomenologically fundamental sense of *the indeterminate* so very well captured in the phrases from Hughlings Jackson's patients who report themselves "as if in a strange place," or as "in a strange country," of a place "looking confused and seeming strange," at that point where vertigo is the moment and condition of transition, of consciousness as transient and evanescent. Color, in its fundamental qualities - hue, saturation and intensity - is peculiarly apt to capture the rhythm and pulse of such experiences that seem more a matter of dimension than extension, and it is this sense of an available dimensionality - *des étendues illimitées* - as also the noted capacity of self-observation in such states that Breton seeks to capture in the phenomenology of passivity.

On many occasions, though especially in the encounter with Nadja, Breton avails himself of this neurologically based imagery to articulate the Surrealist field of experience (*les champs magnétiques*), but there is one particularly telling use, in 1934, in the essay that would become the first chapter of *L'Amour fou*: "L'équation de l'objet trouvé." In the version of this essay as published in *Minotaure*, Breton publishes a photograph that may at first glance appear to be of lightning; the photograph bears a legend that makes the lightning effect emblematic of the very activity of Surrealist inspiration, *L'image, telle qu'elle se produit dans l'écriture automatique*, 1934.¹⁵¹ What is significant about this image is that it is not at all obvious that it is (simply) lightning or that it is supposed to function as simply an image of lightning as, in context, Breton speaks of a *solution* to the problem of beauty in such a way that maintains an ambiguity between the image of light as the result of a biological chemical reaction (the Surrealist *precipitate*) and the image of light as action/lightning (which would be beauty as *explosante-fixe*), the ambiguity being such as to figure *communicating vessels*, that is, a field wherein interior and exterior could not be readily distinguished the one from the other. Thus not only does Breton continue throughout his *oeuvre* to avail himself of the neurological typology of sudden and rapid excessive discharge, of neurological *convulsion*, he uses such metaphors, in relation to his developing account of passivity, to define the Surrealist *activity* as a *field* of *multiple agencies* - and this, I

¹⁵⁰ Cf. André Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, I, 338.

¹⁵¹ Cf. André Breton, "La beauté sera convulsive," *Minotaure*, no.5, (1934), 10.

should like to suggest, however brief the comparison, is the same neurological terrain as Prynne's "Again in the Black Cloud" from *Wound Response*, the very title of which gives agency over to the *wound* even as the human body might be understood as bearing this wound. Where for Breton the problematic is of passivity and agency – inspiration is too crude a terms that forecloses thinking – as terms of Hegelian relationality, for Prynne the problematic becomes passivity, agency and (Hölderlinian) measure within a field (*l'étendue*) marked by the indeterminate and shaped by cross-matching modalities in such a way that no marks of demarcation are available to distinguish inside and outside, nor (ontological) kinds. "Now, says Breton, it is not given to man to plan the rapprochement of two realities so distant. [...Rather it] must be conceded that the two terms of the image are not deduced one from the other by the mind in view of the spark to be produced [aimed for], that they are the simultaneous product of the *activity* I call Surrealist, *reason being limited to noting [à constater], and appreciating the luminous phenomenon.*"¹⁵² Here, the terrain of Büchner's *Lenz* rejoins the *choric* field of Hughlings Jackson's neurology as a poetics of attention and experience.

¹⁵² André Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, I, 338. My emphases.