

**Revolutionary Desire:
Nonsense in Language and Literature**

Mr. Alexander LaGrand Henkle
Laramie, Wyoming

A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty
of the University of Wyoming Honors Program
and English Honors Program,
Spring, 2020

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements Henkle 2

Introduction..... Henkle 3

Chapter 1 Henkle 7

Chapter 2 Henkle 25

Chapter 3 Henkle 48

Conclusion Henkle 68

Bibliography Henkle 72

Acknowledgements

On Ghosts: Too many figures seem to haunt this work after it is all said and done. Bataille and Nietzsche, as well as Marx's own spectre, blow their blowy fogs across these pages. Perhaps Zizek with his documentaries (I find myself mentally responding to his and Douglas Lain's ideas throughout this thesis), and William H. Gass, whose *On Being Blue* I read by accident, thinking it would be useful, and whose *On Being Blue* I found to be the greatest expository text I could never imitate in a comparatively dry thesis like this, to say nothing of his Stein-analysis I've neglected and his always-deeper Tunnel.

That said, the most important ghosts are those who could still speak, namely Dr. Ulrich Adelt. See, originally this thesis was meant to have a chapter on German Krautrock music, rambling some twenty pages deeper into identity and abjection and noise-as-nonsense and list-as-commodity and post-human new-age, I forget the details as we go along. When the time came, there was too much, and some part needed to be omitted before I drowned myself in these words.

He first responded to my messages (after Dr. Hix, to be mentioned later) asking for early mentorship to the thesis. Our conversations over last summer about the better Amon Düül form a lost basis for the ideas throughout this thesis. His book, *Krautrock: German Music in the Seventies*, stands as a significant cornerstone of Krautrock literature/scholarship and scholarship coming out of UW. He ought not be left out for the influence he provided on this thesis, which is probably least seen for how he was shorted out before writing. That said, let's not let Zarathustra deceive us, as I must pay homage by exceeding the aforementioned master, and bring issue to his Top-50 albums list. Horrendous! Who calls Donna Summer Krautrock or likes the likes of Ton Schein Sterben and Wegmüller's dadrock of *Tarot*!?! Dr. Adelt might claim his fancy Foucauldian analysis and reasonably subjective taste defends him from criticism, but do not be fooled! Here, I provide a footnote¹ of an alphabetical, obviously objective top-25 list, only 25, in all respect to the wrongness of Dr. Adelt's "list." A list built off elitism can only be objective, after all. Maybe you can listen to them as a soundtrack while you read this mess of a thesis.

On Helpers: First, thanks to Dr. Erin Abraham and Dr. Caskey Russel for their tremendous help editing, consulting, talking theory, handling freak-outs, and every other bit of nit-picky help you offered in preventing this from being a mess; this thanks is really too short. Thanks to Dr. Arielle Zibrak for offering support for my vague ideas early on and pointing me to people to talk to, along with life advice, good books, and trying to get me "into the room" of articulation. Thanks to Dr. Joslyn Cassady for getting on me about getting research done early. Thanks to Dr. Harvey Hix for the list of subjects and books to pursue in specifying my vague ideas and helping with Wittgenstein. Thanks to Dr. Rob Colter, Dr. Brad Rettler, and Dr. Susanna Goodin for talking ideas, although I doubt you would like how they have developed. Thanks to Youtube channel Cuck Philosophy for introducing some of these hefty theorists and topics in an accessible way. Anybody else I forgot to thank, thanks.

On Friends: I ought to offer thanks to my loved ones (Mom, Kayley, and Nolan) for dealing with me while I wrote this. Thanks Mom, Kayley, and Nolan. Hope you like it.

¹ Agitation Free- Malesch; Anima- Stürmischer Himmel; Annexus Quam- Osmose; Amon Düül- Psychedelic Underground; Amon Düül II- Yeti; Ash Ra Tempel- s/t; Between- and the Waters Opened; Brainstorm- Smile a While; Brainticket- Cottonwoodhill; Brave New World- Impressions on Reading Aldous Huxley; Can- Tago Mago; Cluster- II; Cosmic Circus Music- Wiesbaden; Dom- Edge of Time; Dyzan- Electric Silence; Exmagma- s/t; Faust- s/t; Guru- UFO; Klaus Schulze- Mirage; Kluster- Klopffzeichen; Kollektiv- s/t; Kraftwerk- 1; Limbus 4- Mandalas; Neu!- s/t; Popol Vuh- In Den Gärten Pharaos; Seeselberg- Synthetik 1; Sergius Golowin- Lord Krishna von Goloka; Silberbart- 4 Times Round Razing; Siloah- s/t; Tangerine Dream- Zeit; Technical Space Composers Crew- Canaxis; Wolfgang Dauner- Output; Xhol- Motherfuckers GmbH & Co. KG; Yatha Sidhra- A Meditation Mass

Introduction- Wherein I ramble for a few pages on being a Fraud

Harry Frankfurt mentions in his most popular essay that “One of the most salient features of our culture is that there is so much bullshit,”² and I find it difficult to disagree. Experiencing the internet over one’s recent lifetime brings up the images of POTUS “covfefe” tweets, the gibberish of image-macro “memes” and “Youtube poop” videos, obscene amounts of jargon and new lexicon thrown everywhere. It would be difficult to even say this is limited to the internet; nonsense is everywhere.

Of course, to pinpoint what all this nonsense is and what it means is rather difficult. A cursory glance at various authors’ use of the word nonsense tends to signify a mere dismissal of the targeted entity at hand, but this does not accurately reflect the power nonsense actually has on people. The first reaction one has to the first few seconds of listening to Merzbow (a musical artist so supposedly nonsensical in a musical context, he receives the genre title “harsh noise”) is not one of mere dismissal or annoyance, but one of fear³. I imagine this must mirror the reactions of those watching a religious zealot “speaking in tongues,” uttering what seems like absolute gibberish to an outsider, but which to believers and the man himself seems to be a sign of God’s influence or speech in Adam’s primal tongue.

Nonsense has become a basis for identity and ideology. The disciple of the gibbering priest identifies this nonsense as something entirely sacred, and that which is “noise” finds its way into the electric guitar playing of Hendrix, never mind this other music labelled as “bad noise” for reasons yet unexplained. Many individuals, myself included, perhaps even enjoy this “bad noise” more than the supposedly “harmonious” music, which is itself made up of noises

² Frankfurt, *On Bullshit*, 1.

³ Or “amusement,” if you are Editor Mr. Dr. Caskey Russell.

under different contexts and organizations. How, then, does one work towards a singular definition of nonsense?

This work attempts to dive into this question firsthand and emerge with a few conclusions. First, that nonsense as an absolute can only really be defined in reference to the subject, replete as their psyche is with the necessary difference of sense and nonsense, the connotation of code, and the need to connect to the external through some form of coherent symbolic order. I then suggest that through this framework, nonsense offers a potential for revolutionary thought and creative opposition to systematic oppression of power. This is then explored in the works of Lewis Carroll, Tristan Tzara, and Gertrude Stein. However, investigating these written works exposes major complications of the nonsense revolution, and I find that we must seek to utilize nonsense in such a way which avoids the commodity fetishes of late capitalism which come into being when nonsense is utilized as a double to signify something else which can be ideologically “sold,” or when it accidentally reproduces the power structures it is directed against. Whether it can do this without becoming entirely inaccessible, however, is a central problem of this thesis.

From the start, there are some obvious distinctions to make. It should be understood that the nonsense pursued in this thesis is primarily literary. Indeed, there are writers who might think of something akin to nonsense as a foundation of good literature. In particular, poet John Keats once wrote in a letter about his distaste for poets like Coleridge, who lacked, “*Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.”⁴ The quality of negative capability becomes an essential quality of poetry for Keats, as he goes on to say, “We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon

⁴ Keats, *Letters*, 71.

us...Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself, but with its subject."⁵ Texts like poetry, which exist without "a palpable design" are central to the creation of nonsense. Nonsense can never be completely measured with all the faculties of sense, and for the development of any kind of original idea (as we find in the next chapter), nonsense has a very important literary value, one which is even revolutionary. As discussed later in this thesis, Dada and Surrealist literature and theory deal with the limits of a "palpable design," and extend these kinds of revolutionary values.

Next, when we talk about nonsense, there is something of a difference between absolute gibberish and the burgeoning field of nonsense literature or even Keats's negatively capable nonsense. When one reads something like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, there are events, characters, and settings that can be somewhat grasped, whereas when one speaks "nonsense," as in gibberish, it is usually thought that there are no such elements.

Explaining nonsense, Eric Rettberg suggests, rather intuitively, that there are two types of nonsense: a subjective, culturally contingent form of nonsense (i.e. an English speaker hearing someone speak another language without a dictionary in hand), and a "universal nonsense" (i.e. an infant making sounds which one may pretend is speech).⁶ It is deliberate that the judgement of sense and nonsense is determined from the perspective of the listener, not the individual uttering nonsense. This suggests that the existence of "universal nonsense" is questionable; the infant is lacking a certain intentionality in his speech which adults present in their speech, but perhaps there is a less formal emotional intentionality expressed in the infant's cooing, and the use of intentionality in judging some form of nonsense has very obvious problems. A slave owner may not think his slaves are able to compose complex thought and label his slaves' words as an

⁵ Keats, 95.

⁶ Rettberg, "Nonsense Language."

objective nonsense whereas a subjective nonsense unfairly exists. Nonsense is entirely dependent, then, on recognizability, and has less to do with things like contradictions, which are almost always recognizable, and more to do with questions of relevance and expectation.

There are aspects to non-literary, gibberish nonsense which may give insight into the ideological manifestations of nonsense, but justifying the existence of absolute nonsense/gibberish, if it could really exist, is not the primary concern; one could come close to justifying all typos if continuing on this angle, meaning I should not have put so much effort into revisions and edits of this thesis. Merely looking at gibberish without the contexts around describing nonsense would ignore the power structures at play when someone like President Trump types out nonsense and garners media attention as opposed to Gertrude Stein's feminist brand of nonsense. Therefore, the framework of revolutionary desire, incorporating thought from Marxist, postmodern, and semiotic thinkers. I think without a point of reference, one reading this thesis may take it as a load of nonsense, which I would not say is terrible in and of itself⁷, but would probably not meet the thesis committee's demands.

It may become evident to you at this point that there is a disconnect between writing this as a commodified product of the university machine and actually pursuing anything resembling true revolution against such power structures. Apart from the quotes of revolutionary work in this thesis, some of the less focused parts of this introduction are probably the closest thing to an act of revolution evident in these pages. We'll let the theory and subsequent analysis decide, I suppose. But if the dated nature of this text does not stand the test of time, perhaps it can at least

⁷ Recall Friedrich Nietzsche: "One does not only wish to be understood when one writes; one wishes just as surely not to be understood. It is by no means necessarily an objection to a hook when anyone finds it incomprehensible..." (*The Gay Science*, aphorism 381).

function as another step in the Wittgensteinean ladder, which after receiving an understanding, one pushes away.

I think the purpose and structure of this thesis was best articulated by Jacques Derrida himself, who said,

There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology-in other words, throughout his entire history-has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play.⁸

This analysis outlines the two ways interpretations, and their channeling beings, exist: by bringing the past to the present, and by bringing the present to the future. The first lies in the ability to develop a history and define a past meanings. One does this by committing to “origin,” looking for the meanings in a text by itself. Analyzing texts brings the presently living into the past, to find the ways nonsense has meant before now. The latter is an attempt to destroy the past’s rigidity, even if continuing these meanings to make them a new kind of old, or to subvert them and find a new existence. It is to be alive. As our attentions shift through the thesis from the origin of the concept “nonsense” to the origin of “revolution,” I hope for a transition from the first interpretation to the second, from death to a living beyond living, quickly to that terrifyingly formless child of our lost futures.

⁸ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 292.

Chapter 1- Wherein, like all the Great Modern “Philosophers,” I batter you with the Names of theorists until you Concede and Skip to the next chapter.

There have not been many debates as contentious and interesting as that between Ludwig Wittgenstein and Ludwig Wittgenstein, earlier and later respectively. He both sided with and rejected the logical positivists in his time, but more importantly, he articulated ways of understanding the difference between sense and nonsense.

In the *Tractatus-Logico Philosophicus* (his earlier work), Wittgenstein says, “Only a proposition has sense,”⁹ and “Propositions can be true or false only by being pictures of reality.”¹⁰ This would suggest nonsense is a result of making an utterance which has no propositional content, and therefore does not offer a picture of reality. In this way, Wittgenstein’s perfect sensical language is silencing, and phrases are communicated merely to offer pictures of reality. As he puts it, “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.”¹¹

This has been influential on many modern players in the field of analytic philosophy. Harry Frankfurt essentially claims throughout *On Bullshit* that bullshit, and its analogue identification with nonsense¹², occurs when a “statement is grounded neither in a belief that it is true nor, as a lie must be, in a belief that it is not true.”¹³ Such nonsense is, apparently, even worse than a lie, because at least a liar is limited to the truth constraints of reality, whereas a bullshitter has no respect for reality. Frankfurt later goes on to suggest the implications of this are rooted deeper than initially seen, as an ideology which does not allow for a speaker to have a straight connection with a notion of external reality¹⁴ cannot possibly attempt to be talking about

⁹ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, aphorism 3.4, 64.

¹⁰ Wittgenstein, aphorism 4.06, 72.

¹¹ Wittgenstein, aphorism 7, 117.

¹² Frankfurt, *On Bullshit*, 24.

¹³ Frankfurt, 33.

¹⁴ i.e. German Idealism, according to a conversation with Dr. Rob Colter.

reality or any truth values. Frankfurt thinks that the signifiers ought to connect to one another in the same pattern as occurs in reality, objects specifically denoting relationships with other objects in a way that can be verified as true or false. If words are vague or perhaps suggest more complication than offered by true-false sensibilities, the speaker utters irresponsible bullshit.

If this notion of Frankfurt's sounds rather vague, I would dare say it is, and that much of his argument takes place in light of certain implicit assumptions, such as this external reality which grounds truth functions objectively, or more importantly the ability to have a direct perception of it. For him, nonsense, which ought to specifically denote certain types of speech, and bullshit, which is a derogatory term meant to connote one's speech with profane corporeality, are the same, bringing added baggage to a non-prescriptive conception of nonsense. Proponents of Frankfurt (like G. A. Cohen) find more nuance than Frankfurt lets on in his essay, but this notion of an inability to apply true-false values to a statement of bullshit will soon prove to be useful when we dive deeper into the nuances of nonsense.

But for the most part, Frankfurt's strikes me as somewhat shorthanded on reaching a working definition of nonsense. Notice, for one, how this model allows Frankfurt to call anything nonsense merely because he either does not agree with it or does not believe it reflects reality. An interview reveals that when he is asked for a recent example of bullshit, he brings up "Senator Kerry, representing himself as qualified to be commander in chief..." While he was hesitant to delve into such matters as to avoid becoming political, and while it may appear a strawman to point to this singular instance of the author's personal opinion, I can't help but feel like Frankfurt synthesizes his theory in this way, so as to justify his own reasons for "calling bullshit" or some other such mode of action. In particular, G. A. Cohen, when responding to Frankfurt's essay, adds nuance to and extends Frankfurt's theory to decry all that nonsense of

postmodern philosophers, claiming rather erroneously that, “This kind of academic bullshit...comes close to being celebrated for its very unclarity,” and “truth is, in much postmodernism, extremely disparaged”¹⁵. The only support he gives for these claims are the writings of Alan Sokal, the man behind the infamous “Sokal Hoax.” To explain briefly, he decided to attack an academic journal with an article purporting to link postmodern theory with quantum physics. The article’s scientific claims were entirely made up and the arguments overly wordy. Although the journal told Sokal that he ought to edit the article, it ended up being published anyways. People claim this to be a successful attack on postmodern theory, showing the theory’s proponents can’t even understand their own writing enough to delineate it from a cheap imitation. However, Sokal himself has even stated that the only real opponent his hoax takes down is the lack of peer-review in journalism, but this has done nothing to stop publicity on the event. If Cohen’s overarching statements on these theories rely on this “hoax,” they are, frankly, quite full of shit.¹⁶

I’m sure anyone in the field of literature or philosophy is aware of this great feud between analytic and continental theory, and it certainly does much to delegitimize a theory if it only serves to entrench one half of this debate. It is also sad, as postmodern theory may offer much to chew on in reference to theory of nonsense should these theorists actually become disposed to read it. The analytic theorists cannot deny that there must be something deeply compelling about nonsense, even if they might sign it off as some intellectual posing or some other such attack on credibility. This is not only to sign off analytic philosophers, as many of the theorists later in this essay often utilize the term “nonsense” to simply point out something their theory doesn’t agree

¹⁵ Cohen, “Deeper into Bullshit,” 333.

¹⁶ For more information on this topic, the video *Did the Sokal affair “destroy postmodernism”?* on the Youtube channel Cuck Philosophy covers this subject pretty extensively, not to mention Jacques Derrida’s response “Sokal et Bricmont ne sont pas sérieux.” (20 November 1997, *Le Monde*)

with. This is often a method of satire, to oppose the targeted object by articulating it as a source of nonsense. But then why, on the flip side, is there so much value to some in nonsense itself? One does not read *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to read a book of gibberish, and even those who regularly attend the priest speaking in tongues do not call it mere nonsense, but the word of God itself. Why are people compelled by “nonsense”?

Perhaps I have been too corrupted by my study of semiotics to give myself fully to this “nonsense as ideological irresponsibility” theory. Under Saussurean theory, language works as a system of difference. Not only can we tell that a word is representative of an object, for example, because it is not actually that object, but because it is not other words. The classic example consists of the word “tree” obviously not being the object of a tree, but also not being the word “three,” “free” or “androgynous,” although psychoanalysis may have a few words to say about that. Through such a model, Jacques Derrida is able to unpack that not only are the words set apart in such differences, but the ideas as well, being as they are only ever expressed through language and other structures.

Derrida describes the justification of a structure as classically relying on some center, like an axiomatic origin point, perhaps, which organizes “play” within the structure. However, this center cannot be playful itself, as to contradict itself would relinquish the structure of its center, and so the center is not structural and, ironically, “cannot be the center.”¹⁷ A structure is then, instead, set up on a system of these Saussurean differences, “contradictorily coherent”¹⁸ in setting up a binary. For example, the structure of sense is related in terms of the difference between truth and falsity. I do not think that Frankfurt was entirely wrong when he said that nonsense disrespects the binary of true-false judgements, but in doing so, it now perhaps creates

¹⁷ Derrida, *Writing & Difference*, 279.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

a new center, built on the binary of sense and nonsense, developing further in “a linked chain of determinations of the center.”¹⁹

It is with this idea that I introduce some of the complicated nuances of later Wittgenstein, in which words are not dependent on some direct relationship with reality, but on a social relationship through what he terms “language games.” Essentially, the utterance of any given word communicates meaning on the basis of rules and context surrounding that word. For example, the word “bullshit” can be used as a noun (a bull’s fecal matter), as a demand (“Bullshit!” so as to demand a better explanation for a previous reason given), as an adjective (to describe one’s speech), as a signifier of taking another’s potentially successful move in the popular card game, etc. In each of these cases, the same word is used, but the surrounding contexts of the word and the ways a given word is *used* are what determine the meaning. Meaning is no longer determined by some one-to-one relation with reality nor by some singular definition, but by the ability to reach meaning across multiple individuals and contexts.

I was initially concerned as to whether or not Wittgenstein was attempting to exclude the notions of difference within these rules or whether these rules were something merely inherent to each game. For instance, the *Philosophical Investigations* starts off with a quote from St. Augustine, on which he comments, “These words, it seems to me, give us a particular picture of the essence of human language...Every word has a meaning...It is the object for which the word stands. Augustine does not speak of there being any difference between different kinds of words.”²⁰ This would seem to suggest that the signifiers within a language are reached through common, singular consensus, but this doesn’t seem quite right. How could one even hope to define a game unless it were contrasted with other games, other rules? Later on, Wittgenstein

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, aphorism 1, 2.

seems to agree that difference must play a role, when he states, “language-games are rather set up as *objects of comparison*...by way not only of similarities, but also of dissimilarities.”²¹ While meaning is assured through difference, there is a point that language functions on likeness as well. This is something Wittgenstein refers to as family resemblance, the quality when certain games and words in language can find commonalities. These families categorize the type of words we use, such that one and two are both numbers, red and blue colors, and so on through the networking web of language, each of these families relying on something of a new center to constrain play of the language games.²²

This latter concept almost sounds Peircean, in which words gain meaning as referents, diverting meaning to other words and concepts. His model of language first begins when a sign is uttered, sparking the communication of the initial idea. The way a sign is posed in the context creates a representamen, by which the sign is made to point to some specific posturing in the sign utterance. The interpretant is then reached for by the reader, something like a grand concept or higher idea to literally interpret the sign with its overall message in communication. The interpretant is a sign in itself, of course, and this branches out the network of signs, representamen, and interpretants to connect language as a whole. Wittgenstein’s idea of family resemblance seems to me to point to the network of interpretants connecting and diverting signs into their respective categories, bound by the rules of various representamen.²³

This kind of model gives a more nuanced and accurate account to the ways people actually think about nonsense. Sense is reached when people play by the rules of meaning in the various games played. Alternatively, it seems like nonsense is reached when the rules are broken,

²¹ Wittgenstein, aphorism 130, 48.

²² Wittgenstein, aphorisms 66-67, 32.

²³ Peirce, *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology*, 4-23.

or when someone is adopting rules from another game for the particular game being “played.” This is best rooted in an understanding of what Wittgenstein is trying to oppose, namely the rule-breaking of early Athenian philosophers. For example, Socrates might ask, “What is virtue?” but without allowing the definition to be reduced to the context of any given language game. By abstracting this idea to a universal concept, Wittgenstein says, there is no possible meaning which can be attached to a word, such as virtue, and whatever Socrates follows as a definition is nonsense.

This type of definition is reflective of the Peircean model as it extends in Umberto Eco’s writing, who articulates language as made up of codes. This is best explained in the model of a metaphor lifted from Aristotle which functions by the relation “D->(I)->A,” where D and A are connected words, and (I) is the interpretant, signifying a higher concept to find commonality between the two words/objects related within the metaphor. The example given in the book is “Birch->Flexible->Girl.”²⁴ Of course, this common interpretive element is not something inherent to the objects themselves, but something imposed by the family resemblance in a language, which itself is coded by a particular culture. Eco goes on:

The success of a metaphor is a function of the sociocultural format of the interpreting subjects’ encyclopedia²⁵. In this perspective, metaphors are produced solely on the basis of a rich cultural framework, on the basis, that is, of a universe of a content that is already organized into networks of interpretants, which decide (semiotically) the identities and differences of properties. At the same time, content universe, whose format postulates itself not as rigidly hierarchized but, rather, according to Model Q, alone derives from the metaphorical production and interpretation the opportunity to restructure itself into new nodes of similarity and dissimilarity.²⁶

²⁴ Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, 98.

²⁵ This term is used throughout Eco’s book as a model for how language functions from a mode of entailment of meaning as opposed to a simple one-to-one “dictionary” model. An encyclopedia articulates history of topics by diverting their meaning to other topics in labyrinthine fashion, suggesting something more complex than a system of difference and definition in meaning. After all, one opens a dictionary to find words defined by more words.

²⁶ Eco, 127.

To unpack this, meaning within language, as present in the phenomena of a metaphor, is entirely dependent on what the reader knows and whether or not the reader is able to make sense of it. But as it is, metaphors themselves help to invent language, restructuring what is conceived as correlated and what is structured by difference. Eco even claims later that it is by metaphors that one understands the coded networks of meaning in a culture, not the other way around, as these metaphors are that which identifies these invisible interpretants which exist between disparate elements.²⁷

With this extra nuance, sense would be the ability to communicate within a network of culturally codified understandings and rules through games and metaphors in language. The previous definition of nonsense, however, requires some more nuance. It would seem that if nonsense comes from breaking the rules of the language games, metaphor should not be able to work at all, as it requires relating two separate games in a given language. It is because of the all-encompassing nature of cultural code within language, however, that a game can be made out of metaphorical speech. But as this code is partially altered and constructed from the creation of metaphor itself, it seems as though the development of language requires this constant tradeoff between sense and nonsense. Metaphor relies on the subversion of sense; it would make little sense to say that a young girl is quite literally a tree. However, it is also this subversion of sense which allows for new articulations of meaning between individuals, and based on the success of metaphor in literature and poetry, there is something valuable about new modes of articulating meaning which compels me to adopt theories of semiotics and the later Wittgenstein over logical positivists and the early Wittgenstein. Nonsense cannot be signed off as mere irresponsible

²⁷ Eco, 129.

gibberish, but as something necessary to the ways meaning is articulated in language, something driving that shift of a structural center.

Of course, uttering nonsense in an attempt to express some kind of meaning, to communicate a representation of myself through language's constructions, would seem a bit counterintuitive. If I stood to defend my thesis and spoke in complete gibberish, I would be laughed down from the pulpit, although I suspect certain professors would already consider this a work of gibberish by now. But still, it seems for conventional order and identification to take place, sensical entities must be identified with. Ego formation is a central aspect to psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, and this essentially occurs through the unconscious adoption of myth (Oedipal) and the traumatic mirror stage. More on this later with Alice and her mirrors, but what's important to understand is that this enforcement of the symbolic order is directly mirrored in the ideological structures of capitalism. Theodor Adorno suggests, "The concepts of order which it [the culture industry] hammers into human beings are always those of the status quo. They remain unquestioned, unanalysed, and dialectically presupposed."²⁸ This order ideologically manifests not only from the content of the products, but also in the mode of distribution in the capitalist market. Cultural goods can only be defined through the fetish of exchange and commodity "as the veneration of the thing made by oneself which, as exchange-value, simultaneously alienates itself from producer to consumer."²⁹ This alienation causes any judgement of taste and enjoyment through use-value to be completely quashed, as "Every 'psychological' aspect, every ersatz satisfaction, depends on such social substitution"³⁰ of exchange-value.

²⁸ Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Collected Essays*, 104.

²⁹ Adorno, *Culture Industry*, 38.

³⁰ Adorno, *Culture Industry*, 39.

Insofar as the individual must relate to others in language and production is controlled by the ideological order of capitalism, then language, which is an ever-evolving productive order of new games, is constrained in the world of capital. In order to create revolution through any form of communication, it must be able to develop outside the constraints of order imposed by capital on the current form of language. Metaphor is able to change the form of language, as discussed before, but insofar as metaphor is sensical and recognizable, it falls within the sensical order constrained by capitalism. Nonsense is the only way to develop language in such a way that it could possibly find a new system outside capital. The value of nonsense is fulfilling a revolutionary desire outside the manipulation of our subconscious mirror-stage traumas by way of reverting against the symbolic order. Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have defined the revolutionary potential of the schizoid state of mind, the term these psychoanalysts use when one rejects the social order. Since an individual with schizophrenia participates in the act of ‘producing the real,’ they do not need to search for external sources of justification like sense and language, finding it instead in their own production.³¹

One might imagine such a use of nonsense to be counterintuitive, necessarily relying on the force of language and sense to articulate itself. Derrida himself points out that, “we cannot give up this metaphysical complicity [of acknowledging the concept of the sign] without also giving up the critique we are directing against this complicity.”³² In other words, nonsense cannot be considered a complete rejection of sense without perhaps losing its reference point, its justification for being nonsense. But understanding the way nonsense is able to expand beyond language relies on anticipating the potential new center the shift to a sense-nonsense dichotomy creates. In the world of dialectic, contradicting entities do not cancel each other out necessarily,

³¹ Peretti, “Capitalism and Schizophrenia.”

³² Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 281.

but create something resulting from both entities, namely a synthesis. Derrida's shifting notion of a center seems to anticipate such a creation of a synthesis by first accounting for the phenomenological foundation for such a synthesis to occur. When sense must battle with the formidable opponent of nonsense, it must learn to adapt elements common between sense and nonsense, creating a new structure of language which must learn to include the manifestations of the self outside imposed orders. Derrida hints at this new synthesis as one "conserving all these old concepts within the domain of empirical discovery while here and there denouncing their limits, treating them as tools which can still be used...there is a readiness to abandon them, if necessary, should other instruments appear more useful."³³ The elements of this new structure of language incorporate elements from outside the influences of capitalism's and other ideologies' limitations on language, and the synthesis pushes the trajectory outside these impositions.

Dada and Surrealist theorists were driven by these ideas to create literature that was difficult and often nonsensical in an effort to create this kind of synthesis, relying on unconscious drives and aleatoric construction to write fractured texts. One of the principle drivers, as outlined by Andre Breton in the "Surrealist Manifesto," was, "Pure psychic automatism by which it is intended to express, either verbally or in writing, the true function of thought. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason, and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations."³⁴ This is more often referred to as automatic writing, the literal ability to transcribe one's thoughts without any effort. The parallel with negative capability is obvious, being in complete isolation from rationality. As well, their models of poetry were built on the unification of drastically different elements, regardless of whether or not such connotations make sense. Breton describes the process of automatic writing as the joining of conscious and

³³ Derrida, 284.

³⁴ Breton, "First Surrealist Manifesto."

unconscious processes, thus bringing these two disparate spheres together, and Tzara instructs authors to compose poems by cutting and rearranging the words from a newspaper article.³⁵ The linking of different styles creates important links not seen previously when these words are seen in their proper contexts. This harkens back to Wittgenstein's model of meaning, where meaning is found by "seeing connexions"³⁶ in articulations where language feels held back and grammar fails us, and Eco's model of metaphor, where the association of distinct, separate signifiers is able to create new interpretants not previously conceived and therefore, reinvents societal code.

The creation of this disjointed, fragmentary style of writing is a direct method in opposing the capitalist structure. Breton himself claims that surrealism leads to a "destruction of all other psychic mechanisms,"³⁷ suggesting the path to schizophrenia once again. J.M.

Bernstein, in an introduction to his collection of Adorno essays, explains that

Fragmentary writing is premised upon the refusal of the operations that establish 'rational' connections between states in their theoretical discourse (inference, entailment, deduction) and their linguistic representatives ('therefore', 'because', etc.). For Adorno, these operations are the markers for domination in the conceptual realm...Historical truth is 'shown' in fragmentary writing, which does not explicitly aim to demonstrate or to explain. Explaining and demonstrating neutralize the phenomena in question.³⁸

This mode of fragmentation is necessary to conceive of ideology outside oppression, as discussed previously. Bernstein also notes on the important "multiplication of diverse perspectives" in fragmentation, suggesting the ability to represent thought "masked" by the dominant ideology. After all, it is the order of the dominant ideology to label other ideologies and to be nonsensical, and any individual unfitting of the conceivable ideal is excised from the mainstream. These voices can only be heard by proliferating this supposed "nonsense" in direct

³⁵ Tzara, "Dada Manifesto..."

³⁶ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, aphorism 122, page 49.

³⁷ Breton, "First Surrealist Manifesto," 75.

³⁸ Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, 8.

opposition to the order and language enforced by these power structures. As Gerald Bruns importantly points out,

Language is imperative, a top-down structure of power and obligation in which nothing is expressed except utterances agreed on in advance. A poem under this regime [particularly nonsensical/experimental poetry] would be simply what cannot be said...no one thing counts as language, but only events of speech controlled by historical and cultural disciplines...³⁹

Of course, this pursuit of revolution through nonsense is complicated by our attempts to define nonsense in the first place. We have discussed how nonsense is defined through an ability to make utterance without reference to societal codes. Also recall that it is through code an individual can recognize something in the first place. But there is a sense in which we can recognize nonsense. While the content of what is recognized as “nonsense” is perhaps not parsable for a reader, the ability to label such speech as “nonsense” is something a reader can apply and recognize, the content itself ignored. For such a reader, this nonsense merely reinforces the social order through his understanding of the sense-nonsense dichotomy. The revolution has become false, a brief Bacchanal lapse so that everyone can return to their sensical homes in the morning, or a homelessness at which the “sensible” people point and laugh.

On the flip side, if the content of nonsense is considered by its reader and provides a new form of sense, it is no longer subject to a revolutionary definition of nonsense. Baudrillard talks extensively on the nature of signs into simulacra in his work. Recall that initially, basic signs reflect reality through reference to objects. The creation of simulacra occurs when the reference of signs becomes distanced from its original reference, first creating a mask of reality, then masking the absence of reality, and finally bearing no relation to any reality, fabricated or not.⁴⁰ The value of simulacra signs in this situation is the pure exchange of signs with other signs,

³⁹ Bruns, *The Material of Poetry*, 108.

⁴⁰ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 6.

bearing obvious parallel to Adorno's model of exchange-value replacing use-value in late capitalism. The abstraction of signs is explicated in the creation of Disneyland, where the fantastical world of Disney which was once utilized in a dichotomy to assure the reality of America, it is now itself a new reality, creating exchange out of experience.⁴¹ Similarly, nonsense itself is no longer a justification to ensure the world of sense, but now a new form of meaning.

The creation of a new reality, even if in simulacra form, may seem initially like a good thing, as the world of the revolution offered by nonsense is now conceivable as some form of proliferating meanings, an issue suggested by authors like Jonah Perretti and Mark Fisher in the modern consideration of alternatives to capitalism. However, the nature of simulacra is the inability to refer to any possible reality. Baudrillard rightly points out that the ability to cultivate meaning in the forms of simulacra only feeds back into the market, as he states,

To a system whose argument is oppression and repression, the strategic resistance is the liberating claim of subjecthood. But this strategy is more reflective of the earlier phase of the system, and even if we are still confronted with it, it is no longer the strategic terrain: the current argument of the system is to maximize speech, the maximum production of meaning...All the movements that only play on liberation, emancipation, on the resurrection of a subject of history...do not see that they are going in the direction of the system, whose imperative today is precisely the overproduction and regeneration of meaning and of speech.⁴²

The very idea of even attempting to liberate oneself from the oppressions of society only plays into the constraints of such oppression as the society's myths have instilled in our minds. As such, capitalism is once again able to exploit the orders imposed on an individual's self-conception, on action itself, and sell nonsense as another product, even a supposedly revolutionary one. It would be easy to point out how much money every text I am analysing in

⁴¹ Baudrillard, 10-11.

⁴² Baudrillard, 59.

this thesis may have cost had I not either rented material from the library or pirated it. Even more pressing, however, is the way these meanings provided by nonsense are reincorporated as fetishes capitalized on once again. John Berger importantly points out that “According to publicity, to be sophisticated is to live beyond conflict. Publicity can translate even revolution into its own terms.”⁴³ Even when the road to revolution is paved with good intention and potentially effective, the exchange-natures of capitalism, be it publicity or the nature of simulacrum, will always be sure to make revolution into something which supports the structures of capitalism again.

This is evident in the adoption of surrealist aesthetics in advertising and the way a nonsensical story like Alice can be recreated into the pro-capital, pro-colonial narrative like *The Wizard of Oz*, much the bowdlerized adaptations of Alice to be covered later. It is difficult to say whether the possible meanings and reference created within nonsensical simulacra are able to promote truly revolutionary messages or are only commodified as exchange-value once again. After all, much nonsense is not really read, but merely absorbed in images. Perhaps there are ideological elements of nonsense texts which have difficulty finding their way back into the cultural market, but either these ideas are significantly cleaned up to be marketable or are denied proliferation in their reproductions.

Of course, none of this, theoretically, should be a problem for the individual with schizophrenia. As he does not value the external entity of language to self-identify, it is not the forms and manifestations of nonsense which interest schizoid identification. It does not seem as if the content of nonsense which is particularly compelling to an individual with schizophrenia either. Rather, the schizoid state of mind is identified by the symbolic order as nonsensical, as

⁴³ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 150-151.

meaningless. This ordering brings up the obvious question of the ability for an individual with schizophrenia to conduct revolution. Peretti talks about how the problems an individual with schizophrenia faces stem primarily from the impositions society attempts to place on his “production of the real,” but nevertheless describes his life as clinical, and suggests there needs to be a pattern of finding cultural identities.⁴⁴ He refers to Jean Laplanche who suggests that the schizoid withdrawal from identity is followed by a tendency to find identity once again, and Peretti then suggests that revolution ought to occur through “the rhythmic flow between schizophrenia and identificatory impulses, those identificatory ones oriented directly against the ideology of capitalism.”⁴⁵ This directly mirrors the pattern taken by capitalism itself by shedding and acquiring identities appealing to the individual through products, and ought to point to the obvious issue of revolutionary ideals again and again becoming fetishized in the market.

While it may seem as if the schizo-affected individual does not provide a solution for restructuring a sustainable society apart from capitalism, I think the possible conception of identity proposed by Galen Strawson offers a link otherwise. In his book *Things That Bother Me*, he states that rather than the idea of conceiving oneself through an idealized narrative, he experiences his life as “a kind of bare locus of consciousness, a mere (cognitive) point of view,”⁴⁶ comparing the experience to depersonalization. He claims to experience his life as a series of momentary events constantly coming and going. Not only is such an individual divorced from societal constraints of placing oneself in logical narrative continuity, but also concerns of character, as he writes, “For most people, their personality is something unnoticed,

⁴⁴ Peretti

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Strawson, *Things that Bother Me*, 31.

and in effect undetectable, in the present moment. It's what they look through, or where they look from...not an object of experience."⁴⁷

The ability for Strawson to create this lense of identifying characteristics connects with Lacan's conception of the self as a constant attempt to find consensus between the self as object by identifying with external entities. From a Lacanian perspective, Strawson's self-perception is schizoid, breaking apart from the constructs of time and continuous identity, but Strawson is undeniably able to construct important ethical and metaphysical concepts. In fact, Strawson claims that individuals who conceive of their lives through narrative or some other such external idealization are driven by self-importance in ethical dilemmas, and the ability to live in a detached manner allows one to better evaluate moral actions within each transient moment.⁴⁸ Decisions occur without reference to a large web of preconditioned meanings, allowing for the last potential of any revolutionary thought free of myth and impositions of power.

The implications for a schizophrenic revolution are tremendous, but being able to evaluate a situation to set revolution in order must require content which such a detached individual can incorporate. In order for nonsense to provide such revolutionary content, it is faced with the complicated job of providing a potential sustainable structured message while keeping this message in the realm of the deterritorialized transient moment, somehow outside the grasp of commoditization. Is this even possible?

Whether or not classic nonsense texts have avoided commoditization today, I buy into the argument that many of these texts have at least reflected, if not extended, revolutionary drives. Literature carries the ghosts of texts like Stein's *Tender Buttons* and Carroll's "Jabberwocky" far after the death of their authors. Even if their spectral revolutions of these texts go on ignored,

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Strawson, 56-57.

analysing what texts like these accomplished may help us delineate what about nonsense could still extend revolution. The sublime content of nonsense, if any, could provide a schizophrenic fulfillment of revolutionary desire which resists the flexible codes and ideology of capitalism.

Chapter 2- Wherein I tell you the Way to read like a Proper Child

In the first ten pages or so⁴⁹ of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, Lewis Carroll would change the nature of the English language. It starts simply enough; Alice tries to get her cat to play chess when she looks into a looking-glass mirror on her desk. The mirror's physical boundaries fail her, and she ends up falling into its reflection to a new world. Chaos ensues, with angry chess pieces and their screaming children, a pencil writing notes and a book of reversed writing. Alice can't read it, thinking it's in some other language, but soon holds it up to the mirror and reveals the first few lines of "Jabberwocky:"

Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogroves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.⁵⁰

For over a century, scholars have wondered about the meaning of this poem. Humpty Dumpty took the first stab at definitions. After declaring his domain over sense with the triumphant, "When *I* use a word...it means just what I choose it to mean," he informs us of portmanteau, and unpacks the *obvious* meanings of words in this poem: "gyre" means "to go round and round like a gyroscope," and a "wabe" is "a grass-plot round a sun-dial."⁵¹ Likewise, Martin Gardner annotated his "Jabberwocky" with definitions from the OED, showing us gyre was recorded in 1420 "as a word meaning to turn or whirl around."⁵² It's not as if Lewis Carroll himself didn't have fun poking at the meanings of these words, describing a gyre as "to scratch like a dog,"⁵³ somewhat altering the definition from Dr. Dumpty's. That said, I'd hope we

⁴⁹ Depending on edition; my *Signet Classics* has the Jabberwock's appearance on page 10.

⁵⁰ Carroll, "Jabberwocky," *Alice's Adventures...Looking Glass*, 124, lines 1-4.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 177.

⁵² Gardner, *The Annotated Alice*, 179.

⁵³ Carroll, qtd. In Gardner, 175.

understand the importance of context: none of these definitions, however similar, are exactly the same, and there is more to interpretation than the meanings of words.

But how can we even begin to interpret without accounting for the mirror? This poem has been translated back and forth through its surface, after all. Is the mirror reflecting the writer or the reader? Does a mirror divide or join the viewer with their image when they look into it? Dumpty's portmanteau interpretations may wish to join various disparate words together for meanings⁵⁴, but Carroll himself shows these elements' fundamental differences: to fall into a mirror transports Alice to an entirely new world, full of games and various reversals. We assume this is different from the "normal" world, but all we see of "the normal" comes from either Alice's memory or the brief description of a cat licking her young kittens, neither of which are very reliable considering Alice's difficulty remembering various songs and French grammars. The real reason we see this world as different is because we compare it to our own, and likewise, stare into the mirror of Alice to see our own reflection.⁵⁵

The Lacanian interpretation here has become a standard, and not without making sense. According to Lacan, an infant is born with no conception of itself as a psychologically bound individual. But at some point in its development, the infant develops identification, by which it assumes an image which it recognizes in a mirror, by which the child identifies itself as "more constituent than constituted,"⁵⁶ by which the child finds itself in an external world. This is incongruous, however, with the Ideal-I, which is the self as constituted by the infant rather than constituent of the external world. The infant has a deep-seated love for the Ideal-I but is

⁵⁴ Perhaps foreshadowing his desire for this joining power a few short pages later, when he has his great fall.

⁵⁵ Consider Roland Barthes, who remarked that "In the movie theater, however far away I am sitting, I press my nose against the screen's mirror, against that 'other' image-repertoire with which I narcissistically identify myself" (qtd. in Peretti).

⁵⁶ Peretti.

constantly faced with the fact that this is a fantasy and the reality is the constituent self of the infant's bodily reflection as an external object. This traumatic experience forces the infant to develop a desire for the other (being the Ideal-I, which the infant lacks) which forces the infant to live in a world of fighting between its own ego and the external world of symbolic order. Part of this symbolic order, of course, is language and sense, the means by which the infant engages in the external world. The infant is forced to reconcile with these entities as an unfortunate necessity, opposed to the idealized image of one's self. The infant recognizes the external existence of his phallus (or lack thereof). This thrusts the child into the psychosexual dynamics of thought: my phallus ensures my existence in a symbolic reality. My mother lacks a phallus, so she must have been castrated. The phallus ensures my dominant grasp on reality over a woman's grasp through the symbolic. Castration means a loss of this dominance over the real and symbolic.⁵⁷

Mirrors not only create identity, but they help to sell us things. When one passes in front of the store window, they see a faded reflection of their own face in the plastic dummy's sexy, blank expression. When one gets a haircut, they are sat in front of a mirror, forced to stare at their black tufts of hair falling to the crimson apron, made to watch as the scissors baptize and bring forth their new self for twenty dollars and that fateful itchy neck. When we see ourselves in the mirror, we look at what other people see⁵⁸, and we know that after a quick exchange of capital, we can make others see something we like better. This is how ideology imposes itself, seducing us into believing we can close the gap between the ideal-I and external self.

My examples are mere summaries of Adorno, who said "men become objects that can be manipulated without further objection and thus fall far behind the potential which lies in the

⁵⁷ Peretti.

⁵⁸ At least, what we *think* other people see, since the gaze is always lensed.

technical forces of production. But since as subjects men themselves still represent the ultimate limit of reification, mass culture must try and take hold of them again and again.”⁵⁹ In simpler words, we are sold an identity which allows us to be an object in capitalism’s scheme, but when we gain subjectivity above this scheme, we gain a new identity which capitalism can sell to us again. It’s this tradeoff which lies at the heart of capitalism’s limit, at the individual’s realization of the schizoid mindset, wherein he no longer takes on any objectifiable identity. But whether Alice achieves the schizoid mindset requires reading without the limits of sense.

Rather than tackling this larger entity of ideology, many scholars analyzing Carroll’s mirrors stick to the simpler job of psychoanalytic interpretation of ego formation and the symbolic order as it manifests in Alice’s psychology. As such, the journey to the looking-glass world (as well as Wonderland) is a terrifying one. Alice bundles quite a bit of anxiety as she makes her way through *Wonderland* and *Looking Glass*. She is faced with a constant change in form (large-small particularly), smiles without cats, and death in the oceans of her own tears. This lack of assured order symbolizes an attempt for Alice to grapple with the insecurity of a developing Ego, striving to fit psychologically in an order which is in constant flux.

With her inability to latch onto such an external order, Alice may be falling under the threats of schizophrenia and madness. She is forced to question this at one point when the Cheshire Cat tells her she must be mad or she “wouldn’t have come here.”⁶⁰ Carroll doesn’t give her any time to really think it over, and claims she simply finds it unconvincing, but he writes in his own diary “when we are dreaming...do we not say and do things which in waking life would

⁵⁹ Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, 92-93.

⁶⁰ Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures...Looking Glass*, 53.

be insane? May we not then sometimes define insanity as an inability to distinguish which is the waking and which the sleeping life?"⁶¹

The importance in Carroll's quote is an ability to distinguish two states, which can't ever really be achieved. We learn by the end of each book that she is dreaming. Alice realizes this well, but never while dreaming does she become lucid. She inhabits the dream as if she were awake, and the reality of Wonderland's world while she is in it offers no assurance that the world she wakes up to is now the real world. While dreaming, one can think they are about to sleep at some future point just as one thinks in waking life, but rarely in the insanity of dreams does one think of waking from this current state, true also of waking life. Since she can't conceive of another waking above the sensibility present in the current world, her reliance on any kind of reality, any kind of sense, is a kind of insanity in losing its distinctions of a new waking world.

At the center of this struggle with dreams in particular lies Alice's own inability to assure herself of her own existence. When she and Tweedledee and Tweedledum happen upon the Red King sleeping in the grass, Tweedledum remarks that "If that there King was to wake...you'd go out--bang!--just like a candle!"⁶² Alice soon after attempts to prove that she is real, that she's not something the King merely dreamt up, by suggesting that she couldn't cry if she weren't real, but the Tweedles are unconvinced by her argument.⁶³

This line of thinking defeats Descartes' answer to the dream problem: deciding whether one can know if their whole life is a dream created by an evil demon. His answer is that thinking is existing (*cogito ergo sum*), and even if one were in a dream, the fact that they are thinking about that dream means they exist in some form. In Alice, we find that even if she is able to think

⁶¹ Quoted in Gardner, *The Annotated Alice*, 80-81.

⁶² Carroll, *Alice's Adventures...Looking Glass*, 155.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

about things, evidenced in her questions and her reaction by crying, it is not as if what she thinks about and reacts to are real experiences. She couldn't even muster up a cogito without mirroring it off the world around her, needing to ask the Tweedles of her own existence. The question is compelling enough for Alice to ask her cat upon returning to her room⁶⁴, unable herself still to determine whether she woke from the King's dream, or her own.

I talk of dreams to speak of the very essence of the mirror stage, that Alice is confused after falling into the mirror whether she exists in relation to others (as a character in the King's dream) or of her own accord (as an ideal self in her own dream). Tweedledum's language remains all-too potent in his mention of a candle, phallic in its shape and loss of length after burning (orgasm). Remember also that Alice, when shrinking, expresses fear as well that she should "go out altogether, like a candle."⁶⁵ Describing a little girl like Alice as a phallic symbol might strike some as strange, but there are many connections. She grows and shrinks at the whim of external forces dealing with the consumption of various foods. The illustration below, which



Lewis Carroll drew in the original manuscript⁶⁶, has a phallic neck, topped with Alice's "head."

⁶⁴ Carroll, 224-225.

⁶⁵ Carroll, 12.

⁶⁶ Carroll, qtd. in Holbrook, 51.

While a woman ought not have a phallus in Lacan's world⁶⁷, the symbolic order relies on the very recognition of the phallus as a symbolic ordering principle, as something which determines the human psyche. The idea of the woman doesn't exist in the notion of the symbolic, being created out of male fantasy and a dependence on the phallus for essence.⁶⁸ If Alice were to go out like a candle, and Alice is renamed phallus, there lies two possible suggestions: the flaccid retreat of the phallus post-orgasm (weakness and "petite-mort"), or the complete loss of the phallus (castration, or symbolic death). Either way, the fear reflects the fear of castration during the mirror stage explained above, as the phallus-bearing man (presumably Carroll) either loses his dominance over the woman or loses his external connection with reality altogether. This fear exists potently in the Red Queen's famous cries for decapitation, not only calling for the loss of the brain, but the removal of the phallus's head as well. Wonderland, and all the characters in it, exist as a dangerous threat to the phallus and phallic order, a world where Carroll could lose his head/penis at the whim of nonsense. Phallus Alice must leave Wonderland to the safety in reality back home, supposedly free of the unpredictable threats of castration.

The Alice books don't stop there in their exploration of a girl distancing herself from the Real. At one point, Alice forgets the names of all the objects in a forest (including herself) mere moments after claiming the arbitrariness of names. She had been asked by a Gnat, "What's the use of their [the insects] having names...if they won't answer to them?"⁶⁹ to which she responds that the use is not to the insects named, but to the people naming them. Once again, the use of language to label an individual occurs as an ordering code to define a person as external object rather than subject. It seems terrifying that she should, then, find herself distanced from any form

⁶⁷ At least, until it crashes against Judith Butler's account of such things, who argued (very well) for "the lesbian phallus" in the second chapter of *Bodies that Matter*. Regrettably, I will not focus on this idea in my arguments.

⁶⁸ Johnston, "Non-Existence and Sexual Identity."

⁶⁹ Carroll, *Alice's Adventures...Looking Glass*, 141.

of order like language once she's been engulfed in this wood. Language plays a very unreliable role throughout the book in communicating information; the queen is constantly obfuscating her own thoughts, and she attempts to speak to a mouse by remembering the mention of a mouse in her brother's Latin grammar book. In fact, this latter example has Alice attempting to speak French to the mouse, asking it where her cat is since it's the first French phrase which she remembered from her lesson book and frightening the mouse.⁷⁰ Language is used to articulate one's identity and thoughts, translating them through the mirror from the internal to the external world. But the mirror of language is a distorting one, and the world around her enforces the idea that she "Better say nothing at all. Language is worth a thousand pounds a word!"⁷¹

Writers like David Holbrook extend the argument further to claim the anxiety and psychological ruptures are Carroll's own. In *Nonsense Against Sorrow*, Holbrook (drawing heavily on Phyllis Greenacre) identifies a primary traumatic experience when Carroll was weaned from his mother rather quickly, replaced by another child. Being surrounded by mostly sisters all his life, he developed a subconscious jealousy to receive attention from his mother which was placed on them as well as a questioning of his own sense of self-identity.⁷² Holbrook suggests this resulted in a stunted growth on Carroll's sexual development. In the classic Freudian view, sexuality develops with an Oedipial desire for the mother. Should the mother become distracted and absent (as Holbrook suggests was caused by the arrival of another child), the "neglected" Carroll becomes fixated on his own anima, those archetypally "feminine" elements within Carroll's "masculine" self. The Alice of the books might be Carroll's idealization of his own anima, reflecting a merge of the images of his own mother as well as

⁷⁰ Carroll, 18.

⁷¹ Carroll, 138.

⁷² Holbrook, *Nonsense Against Sorrow*, 8.

Alice herself as a subjective reality preserved in youth.⁷³ This would explain the androgynous nature of Alice as symbolic phallus and a little girl, the age of youth being one where “*the bodies of boys and girls are most alike.*”⁷⁴ This also lends some explanation to the strong fixation Carroll had with little girls without resorting to their sexualization.

I feel like it’s almost cliché to label Carroll as a closet pedophile nowadays, but Holbrook and Greenacre suggest the rumored pedophilia couldn’t be further from the truth. Carroll’s supposed stunted development, as well as his idealization of youthful androgyny, resulted in a conception of “sexuality represent[ing] a dangerous threat.”⁷⁵ Sexuality results in the birth of more children, something traumatic for Carroll since the birth of a new child signaled yet another abandonment by the mother from his own needs and growth. Morton Cohen claims that Carroll’s shameful countenance of his sinful desires were linked to his attraction to the little Liddell girls⁷⁶, but Holbrook suggests that

...there is a hint that in post-pubertal sexual relationships these qualities [which Carroll cherished in little girls] must be forfeited...Carroll’s ideal girl is like a dog with some of the qualities of Swift’s Houhynhym, capable of pure and perfect love, but devoid of human bodily life, and of adult human emotional life and unconscious dynamics. Of course, the very thought of carnal relations with his idealized girl children would have horrified Carroll.”⁷⁷

He was, without a doubt, obsessed with taking naked pictures of little girls and keeping secret negatives of the images, but Carroll would strongly object to the presence of their brother nude in the same picture. Such a presence would introduce the penis along with a plethora of “male sexual potentialities,”⁷⁸ something which Carroll himself does not provide with the series of gazes and lenses. Rather, Carroll’s desire is to preserve the quality of “purity” he places onto

⁷³ Holbrook, 60.

⁷⁴ Greenacre, qtd. In Holbrook, 13.

⁷⁵ Holbrook, 13.

⁷⁶ Holbrook, 19.

⁷⁷ Holbrook, 20.

⁷⁸ Holbrook, 29.

the image of young girls, to preserve this against time before they should grow up and mature into sexuality and eventual death. His articulation on this point is fascinating, describing these idealized young girls as

...trustful, ready to accept the wildest impossibilities with all that utter trust that only dreamers know; and lastly, curious -- wildly curious, and with the eager enjoyment of life that comes only in the happy hours of childhood, when all is new and fair, and when sin and sorrow are but names--empty words signifying nothing.⁷⁹

This idea that they are able to break from constructs like sin strikes me as suggestive of Carroll's own view of the symbolic order: To see oneself in society's mirror is to finally fit oneself into the strict boundaries external society places on sex and identity. As young girls develop, they learn to see themselves in the mirror of society. Religion is built to keep women in line, reining sexuality into the boundaries of marriage and sin to continue the cycle of sexualization and death. Carroll finds terror and death of a primordial purity in the looking-glass world, and as in its chess-match, the little girl is used as a figurative pawn in the patriarchal game of sex and ideology.

However, Holbrook takes a different turn than I do on this matter. He seems to think the terror lies not in developing into this kind of order, but in the fear Alice finds when schizophrenically distanced from this order. Certainly, Alice's journey is a scary one, as Alice constantly cries and forgets her own name terror. Readers like Holbrook find the Looking-Glass world to be sexually destructive, as the end scene occurs at a dinner gone awry, Alice eating to fill her strong "appetites" and the table's candles suddenly growing to the ceiling, all symbolic signs of sex and orgasm.⁸⁰ The scene is ridiculous and full of nonsense, with the Red Queen falling into gravy and a tablecloth of dishes crashing to the floor. Holbrook suggests the bizarre

⁷⁹ Carroll, qtd. in Holbrook, 19-20.

⁸⁰ Holbrook, 122.

scene is Carroll's sorrowful admittance to Alice's eventual sexual development, the chaotic nonsense and subconscious repression of the pains of his idealization's defeat. The little Alice will eventually grow up and bear children, losing her supposed purity and fall to eventual death.

He uses this framework to explain the subconscious nature of "Jabberwocky." Holbrook refers to Sidney Halpern's connection of the poem to a tradition in Sumerian religious myth of replacing matriarchy with patriarchy by "Enlil (Marduk) slaying the great mother-monster Tiamat."⁸¹ There is a convincing interpretation that the poem's warnings of "the jaws that bite, the claws that catch!"⁸² are a warning against the subconscious fear of the vagina dentata, a fear of the destructive power of female sexuality through teeth on a vagina which could castrate the



man during sex. Just look at the image of the monster in the poem's accompanying illustration (above)⁸³, featuring the long neck of a threatening phallus (as a woman with power must be one with some phallic elements), but an undeniably yonic mouth. By the end of the poem, the son gives a "snicker-snack!"⁸⁴ with his blade, and comes home triumphant, although his father still calls him his "beamish boy,"⁸⁵ suggesting this success has not made this boy into a man. But no

⁸¹ Halpern, qtd. In Holbrook, 127.

⁸² Carroll, "Jabberwocky," *Alice's Adventures...Looking Glass*, 124, line 6.

⁸³ Holbrook, 129. Cropped for emphasis.

⁸⁴ Carroll, "Jabberwocky," *Alice's Adventures...Looking Glass*, 126, line 18.

⁸⁵ Carroll, 126, line 22.

matter, as I think if we put two and two from Holbrook's analysis, the success of the poem comes from its affirmation of the triumph of the phallus over its threats. Whether Carroll read Sumerian is anybody's guess, but Halpern suggests the myth repeats its ideas in Horus and Isis, Perseus and Medusa, and even Psalm 89,⁸⁶ meaning Carroll possibly had access to the psychologically potent archetypes of the myth through a reproduction.

What does Holbrook suggest Alice sees when she reads the poem? He doesn't focus on Alice, but merely the reader's impression, denying the female voice. I think it is implicit in this kind of reading that when Alice reads this poem, she is subconsciously reminded of the fate of feminine power under a symbolic order wherein the phallus prevails. Were she to become an empowered force, she would become some exotic threat, an idea passed down in myth from father to son. She is both powerful, yet weak, the kind of threat which will eventually be overcome by the phallus's "vorpal blade."⁸⁷ The myth works to erase the presence of the feminine, to suggest that the feminine force is a problem to be overcome by the son's quick sexual conquest. Alice is to simply follow along, respecting the phallic and becoming ashamed of the yonic.

This psychoanalytic mode of analysis is a useful, tight model, but I sense something at odds in the trajectory of its interpretation. Holbrook argues that the trip to Wonderland is a painful, traumatic one. Yet, what makes it traumatic is supposedly a break from the social order, whereas certain elements of what I presume are a part of the social order seem to be what cause problems for Alice. Her attempts at politeness (i.e. the rat) as well as attempts to tell people what is right and wrong seem to never work out well for Alice.

⁸⁶ Halpern, qtd. In Holbrook, *Nonsense Against Sorrow*, 127.

⁸⁷ Carroll, 126, line 18.

What pains Alice about Wonderland and the looking glass world is not the randomness and nonsense, but her attempts to impose a sort of sense on top of it. That, or whenever she buys into anyone else's imposed sense, such as the rules of the chess game in which she is treated like a pawn, or the rule of the Queen who then threatens to decapitate/castrate. When she returns to the real world, I don't see any signs that she escapes any kind of order either, as she must wake from dreams of tea in Wonderland to go get her real tea, probably as it's getting cold.

Meanwhile, all those seemingly unordered moments allow for interesting developments. If we buy Holbrook's account of Alice as an expression of Carroll's anima, it is liberating and cathartic for Carroll, as he finds expression for his trauma without the shortcomings of language. It also seems as if Alice doesn't grow any older in Wonderland in spite of all her changes, and so she does not lose that purity Carroll, has idealized her with. Even in the orgasmic scene of *Looking Glass*, I would interpret that she is becoming infuriated with and rebelling against her new sexual developments. When she pulls the tablecloth to the floor, the candles fall with them, suggesting her attempts to rebel against the male phallic order of sexual, as well as social, experience. Likewise, when she shakes the Red Queen afterwards, she is shaking against that ruling, maturely feminine element which she must rebel against, and this action ultimately brings her out of the horror of this experience.

Falling into the mirror or taking a stroll through Wonderland lets Alice see the structures and codes of society back home and declare them absurd. Despite all the differences from ordinary life Wonderland poses, it seems a bit much like English society to be filled with evil queens and chess games played by the rules. If these are dreams of Alice's they must incorporate content from her waking life, but to dream of this content, to experience it in Wonderland, suggests she would be able to play with it, subvert the expectations which accompany it as

Carroll plays with the our expectations of logic and language. Alice leaves Wonderland first with the thought that it had been a wonderful dream, and her sister fantasized of Alice's ability to keep Wonderland within her and carry her youth with her in life.⁸⁸

To say falling through the mirror is merely a traumatic scream is reductive. There is at least something positive and transformative to be found in this journey into the mirror, something which both Alice and the reader find enlightening enough to take back with them. But still, the mirror Alice falls into is not a distorting one, as it is a looking glass. The transformations found in the looking glass world are not created by the mirror, but by Alice's own childish imagination. How, then, ought we to take the mirror? It must have something to do with identity, but it cannot simply be in condemnation of Alice's traumatic difficulty grappling with the social order around her.

Someone like Saul Kripke might think of the journey through the mirror as one through which Alice is able to retain her identity in many different possible worlds by way of rigid designation. Kripke might have it that Alice traverses through not one mirror, but a series of mirrors⁸⁹. Kripke suggests that language functions through what he calls baptism, where an object is ordained with a title once someone names the object. Every time afterward someone refers to that object, they are referring to every other time someone has referred to that name, back in a chain, or a reflection of mirrors, to the original baptism. Such an interpretation does quite a bit, as regardless of Alice's changing shape and situation, she still remains Alice. Even when she forgets her name, we still might call her by her name in the same way Alice calls insects by their names regardless of their response. The journey through Wonderland is

⁸⁸ Carroll, *Alice's Adventures...Looking Glass*, 104-105.

⁸⁹ At least, Umberto Eco would say Kripke would say this when he calls Kripke's theory "a victim of the magic of mirrors" (Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, 213).

reaffirming then as that of some heroic journey where she treks out to experience the fantasy world and experience a redeeming homecoming, assured of her identity. Quite literally, she falls into the mirror, experiences herself in absurd circumstances like trying to read Jabberwocky and follows the reflection back to her true self. She is able to preserve the primordial sense of self even while developing into this sexual figure by always referring back, through a series of designating mirrors, to that original childlike self which she can always identify as.

While this interpretation might seem seducing to some, the theory does not hold up under further scrutiny. For one, it commits the same mistake the psychoanalytic reading in this chapter and the Frankfurt reading in the previous chapter do: dismissing nonsense as something problematic, as something merely in opposition to that apparently “true” order of sense, that order of sense equated with “reality.” What could Kripke do when encountering something as supposedly “unreal” as a Jabberwocky or a Snark? Yet, he cannot dismiss the name as something real, even if it doesn’t really refer to *something*⁹⁰. The Alice books create language outside Kripke’s series of baptisms and Christendom, characters interacting with creatures not ordained by any Phallus-Dei⁹¹. If we take the mirror literally, it doesn’t reflect a history of images, but only an object existing in the present moment as it is, standing before the mirror. Even if an odd number of mirrors were set up so that Alice looks into the mirror and sees a snake inside the frame, this object could not *actually* be Alice, as mirrors do not reflect objects outside of time and, at present, Alice is standing in front of one mirror and not the other, which the snake stands in front of.⁹² In other words, she would only see Kripke’s type of permanent identity formation, one existing through any kind of trick mirror, were she looking through the lens of baptism-

⁹⁰ Illustrations aside, considering there are neither pen nor print for the Snark outside of name.

⁹¹ I take Christianity, like most things Greek, to be patriarchal. I equated Kripke’s theory to Christianity in a kind of beer induced Nietzschean joke concerning baptism, but let me not ruin all the fun by explaining it *away*.

⁹² Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, 213.

language, but the world of Wonderland presents orders outside the ordination of the phallus, meaning Kripke's theories cannot save Alice from what nonsense she sees in the mirror.

Likewise, the Mad Hatter poses to Alice a riddle: "Why is a raven like a writing-desk?"⁹³ To Alice's surprise, the Hatter doesn't know, and there is no answer. The form of a riddle or a joke is set up in a type of call-response structure, the same kind articulated by Alice about naming's importance for those giving the names and Kripke's own theory as a game of telephone and the type of expectation for learning of a story upon reading a dramatic poem. But when the response (the riddle's answer) does not exist, it cannot be determined what relation the name has to it. How could such a thing even be called a riddle? If the Mad Hatter can use the designator "riddle" to refer to something which could not be a riddle, there is a rupture in the baptismal chain, but it still services us to call the Mad Hatter's statement a riddle because of the rules around the way the statement is set up, the game it's meant to play. It is this kind of subversion which nonsense creates: utilizing our expectations of form (i.e. of a riddle) to deconstructing it, shifting the utterance to a new center (i.e. not a riddle/nothing), and showing how such expectation could only be held on arbitrary rules of the expectation.

If Kripke's mirrors are faulty in the face of nonsense, then what does Alice's mirror reveal? It is enlightening to look at how Umberto Eco looks into a mirror. He finds Lacan's analysis interesting, but thinks the way mirrors are thought of after the initial developments allow the subject to become familiar with signs.⁹⁴ Likewise, he thinks there is a confusion when people look into mirrors and imagine themselves inside of them. There is a tendency, in such an event, to look and imagine one's reflection of the left hand to actually be the right and vice-versa, whereas in reality the mirror is simply a direct reflection and duplication of the image, not

⁹³ Carroll, *Alice's Adventures...Looking Glass*, 57.

⁹⁴ Eco, 204.

something useful to imagine oneself in. Apply this to psychoanalytic mirror stage, and we realize that this kind of distortion, of looking at the reflection as if we inhabited it instead of looking and seeing a mere duplication of our image, is what causes the traumatic formation of an ego. The need to ensure that our idealized version of ourselves appears to other people is built on the mistake of thinking that we somehow inhabit the image of ourselves that exists in the other's gaze. This image merely duplicates our existence, and the lense through which the duplicated image is seen, the mirror's division between mind and matter, cannot be overcome.

An important consequence of this fact is that mirrors themselves do not actually produce signs themselves, but merely produce the signs which a viewer places in the midst of the mirror's frame. The mirror doesn't even interpret these objects/signs, as that comes from the viewer looking into the mirror at the objects reflected therein.⁹⁵ He points out that a mirror image cannot be interpreted. The reason is that "The mirror image *cannot be correlated to a content*,"⁹⁶ as the relationship established is not between types (which would manifest in the symbolic of the psyche), but only through tokens (which manifests in the imaginary of the psyche). As such, when one looks at the image present in the mirror, one cannot interpret the image as is and can only interpret the content to which it refers, but not *through* the mirror. Importantly, Eco notes that when looking through a mirror, "if the *interpretability*⁹⁷ is an inherent feature of the content, an image without content cannot by definition be interpreted."⁹⁸ Since the image in the mirror obviously *exists*, there is an image which cannot be read unless it is artificially doubled.

The "Jabberwocky" poem may be reminding Alice of the nature of the phallic order, but not without revealing the futility even those newcomers in the order face. The slayer of the

⁹⁵ Eco, 207-208.

⁹⁶ Eco, 216.

⁹⁷ Eco's emphasis.

⁹⁸ Eco, 217.

Jabberwock is still a boy, because in all honesty, he is simply a slave to the phallic order his master-father has brought him into. The beginning and ending lines of the poem, no matter their definitions, merely repeat each other, implying that this cycle of boy-to-man has no real movement and effect on the world around him, and the phallic order is one of stasis. Most importantly, whatever content is present in the original poem, Alice cannot interpret it. She cannot read the original object of the text (being printed in reverse) and she cannot interpret it through the mirror (since content cannot be interpreted through the mirror, as it is only manifesting in the imaginary and not the symbolic). This can only happen when the aspects of this order have been taken into the looking glass world or into Wonderland, however, because the content of the order is present everywhere symbolically in the real world. It is in this mirror to the real world that Alice finds nonsense, and that Alice, as well as the reader, can find an escape from interpreting in terms of the phallic order. The real definitions of these words as people like Gardner and Dumpty and even Carroll himself have attempted to apply to the poem don't actually matter, since as they're being seen through a mirror, they are only relevant if the interpreter could define them through their backwards printing, which does not pose the same interpretability. But even so, since the text itself functions as a mirror (as per Barthes), the interpreter would have to define these words outside the text itself or define them without reading himself into the mirror of the text, and therefore any definition could not be relevant to the text, truly making them nonsense.

Alice, because she doesn't need to see herself in the mirror, doesn't have to see herself in this twice-reflected poem. She doesn't need to give into the phallic order of sexuality and can bring down the candles in the end and rail against the ruling mother. She can face herself with the possible lack of her own existence in the realm of the real (being a figure in someone else's

dream and the potent symbolism as a phantasm of another's desire) and take pleasure in her supposed lack of essence without symbolically depending on the phallus. She stands outside the phallic order because her journey through the mirror lets her recognize and stand outside the mirror's order. When we read Carroll, we can reach this enlightenment. Nonsense brings about this new kind of identification outside the mirror which is trying to sell the viewer an identity.

But as the fateful inevitability that the real Alice ages into a mother figure, as Carroll must admit that fate of children whose purity must eventually grow up and die away ("In a Wonderland they lie,/Dreaming as the days go by,/Dreaming as the summers die"⁹⁹), so too does the ability to perceive the revolutionary image of Alice grow with time. Readers must interpret, and as such must see content in the mirror and bring in a part of themselves. I think this would be achieved by creating a double in one's own mind of what they see in the mirror, creating something no longer a mirror image but a copy of that image. Interpretations such as Holbrook's, which are premised on realizing Alice's image, destroy the revolution of her image. In interpreting, these writers impose the development of their own phallus once again, making sense of it, falling back on the power sense has to normalize revolution into order once again.

The 1951 Disney adaptation of Alice was, without a doubt, a prime example of the doubling of the Alice character, distorting her into the perversion thought of today. Whatever power the character of Alice had over the terrors of Wonderland are stripped away once Alice becomes an entirely helpless figure in need of order. Her desire for a world of nonsense is depicted as the petty desires of a little girl wishing things were opposite than they were rather than the revolutionary nature of nonsense. Her politeness, rather than getting her into more issues, seems to help her along the way, and many of the subversive language games have been

⁹⁹ Carroll, "Jabberwocky," *Alice's Adventures...Looking Glass*, 225, lines 16-18.

either downplayed or omitted entirely. When she walks through the forest and loses her path, we are meant to feel sad, as the other animals cry for her while she sings a sad song. The rest of this film is filled with more silly songs, goofy character designs, and slapstick humor. It becomes clear from the moments she lies in a field and is adorned with phallic images of flowers how the audience is meant to interpret this Lolita-seductress type figure, much less when she pulls on the “nose” of a talking doorknob. Lost is the neck extension of her growth scene, replaced with a shot between the legs protruding from Alice’s blue dress. There is a moment later during the croquet match where she has troubles with her flamingo’s neck becoming erect and flaccid at random, and manipulates the flamingo to be used by lying on her back and seducing it. The real conflict Disney’s Alice faced was not to resist the phallic demands of womanhood through nonsense’s liberation, but to live up to those expectations. Through this sexualization via submissive infantilization, she has lost the revolution and become an image for the male gaze.

The sexual subversion of the Alice figure became solidified through the supposed “sexual revolution” which soon followed. It is no secret that animated Disney cartoons became well-watched commodities for psychedelic experiences in the 60s, and Alice faced a new kind of doubling. Some might argue that the 60s stood for female sexual liberation, but whatever liberation there was in acknowledging female sexuality, it was not an empowering one. I think of the prime image of counterculture female sexuality as Janis Joplin, who crooned loudly over the phallic guitar provided by another member of her band, a performance that can only be interpreted as a desire dependent on the phallus of the male other. Other female “flower power” types may be known to play acoustic, but often singing love songs (still referring to the phallus provided by the dominant male partner) or being accompanied by an electrified lead player,

almost always a man. Apply this to the reproduction in Grace Slick's "White Rabbit," and it seems she drew more from Disney's movie than Carroll's book in the most unfortunate ways.

It seems inevitable and maybe even almost a little late that around a decade later, *Alice in Wonderland: An X-Rated Musical Fantasy* was released. The film does vague lip service to the idea that Alice need not grow up so early, but even Roger Ebert couldn't be distracted from Kristine de Belle's "perpetual look of total innocence" that makes her look "just like the healthy blond with wide-set eyes and Toni curls that sat across the aisle in high school--or should have."¹⁰⁰ It is almost hard to blame him for the unsettling comment considering the almost paradoxical role youthfulness and infantilization plays in the fetishization of women in heteronormative sexuality. The tragedy is that in light of all these changes, it seems as if it is impossible to read Alice with a pure mind and hopeful spirit of revolution again, much as our perception has been synthesized with these weakening of Alice into something to be subsumed by the phallus. The content is not the same, but with the creation of a double with a very close likeness to what is seen in the mirror's image, it is impossible to recognize the duplicity. It seems that when such revolutionary figures are incorporated into the mainstream, they must be cleaned up a bit, eased of those parts of their content which actually pose a danger to the status quo.

There may be hope in spite of this tragedy in something like Jan Svankmajer's surrealist Czech adaptation *Něco z Alenky*. This title translates to "Something from Alice," and rather than simply ignoring the decades of adaptation and interpretation, it acknowledges the negative effects these cultural products have had in degrading Alice's image. Alice grows without an elongated neck, her enlarged body obscured with a facial closeup, and shrinking into the figure of a doll, reproducing Disney's obfuscation of Alice's phallic features. We are even faced with

¹⁰⁰ Ebert, "Alice in Wonderland."

upskirt shots, but wherein Alice's actor is crammed into a dusty dollhouse/toy castle, complete with wire chicken mesh, arousing not desire but discomfort in the viewer. There are constant cuts to the actress's lips every time any dialogue in the film is uttered, showing a direct link between the sexualization of Alice and her adherence to the political and linguistic order around her.

Alice's ability to transcend her everyday life in Wonderland is undermined when the sets and characters she encounters are all created through stop-motion animation out of assorted house objects and the dirty ruins of post-war Czechoslovakia, meaning her Wonderland is yet another world in which she cannot escape the entities of power around her. There is much to unpack in this film, and it could take a whole chapter if not thesis itself if I did, but the most promising image of liberation in this adaptation occurs at the end, when after having chased an infuriating stuffed rabbit around with no success, she wakes up again in her disheveled room, reaches through the broken glass window of a cage to pull out a rusty pair of scissors, and making the castrating motion, muses, "He's late as usual. I think I'll cut his head off."¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Svankmajer, *Něco z Alenky*.

Chapter 3- Wherein I whine and Howl of too much Sense in nonsense.

a e ou o youyouyou i e ou o
 youyouyou
 drrrrrdrrrrdrrrrgrrrrgrrrr
 morceaux de durée verte voltigent dans ma chambre
 aeiiiiieaouiiiiventre¹⁰²

So starts “Pélamide” from Tristan Tzara’s *Vingt-Cinq et un Poèmes (25 and 1 Poems)*, first published in Zurich in 1918. Understanding that Tzara was writing in French leads one to read the fourth line as “Pieces of green duration leap around my bedroom,”¹⁰³ but little else. One may stretch their imagination to realize that “ou” translates as “or,” and the second line may be an utterance of “there or there or there or” without spaces, albeit with difficult grammatical sense.¹⁰⁴ It could even mean eyes (yeux) by way of sound. If one went further and read this poem aloud, they might even start to think the beginning phrase sounds something like “(he) has/at and/is or oh, there or there or there or there/eyes eyes eyes there and/is or oh.”

After the above translation, this reader, like myself, might be inclined to toss the book across the room and regret ever having heard Tzara’s name. How does one *read* such gargled sounds? It is as if Tzara were trying to play with the reader’s ability to latch on to sense, distracting the reader/listener with what seems like sensical statements only to then take that attention into the next line’s nonsense. In fact, it might even seem offensive to the Dada poet to take the poems as anything sensical. Tzara, Marcel Janco, and Richard Huelsenbeck once read three of these poems out loud at once in different languages at a riotous Cabaret Voltaire meeting, interrupting themselves with whistles and drums. One asks whether the specific words of these poems were meant to be heard over the wall of polylinguistic and mechanical *noise*.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Tzara, *Poesies Completes*, 134.

¹⁰³ Forcer, *Dada as Text, Thought and Theory*, 51.

¹⁰⁴ Personal translation. From here on out, any translation without citation is a personal translation.

¹⁰⁵ Gascoigne, “Boomboom and Hubaloo,” 208.

These poets, the Cabaret Voltaire, all these were a part of the Dada movement in early 20th century Zurich. While the movement started with Hugo Ball's first manifesto, Tristan Tzara wrote the second. Avoiding the pitfalls of Italian Futurist industrial fascism, artists worked to use toilets as art-pieces and assert the human spirit above any and all boundaries.

If, in the previous chapter, we found Alice has at least the possibility of escaping society's codes and creating new ones in revolution, Dada artists like to suggest they have put this revolution into action in their poetry and displays. Tzara proclaims, supposedly without pretention, that "**TODAY** *criticism balances no longer launches resemblances/...Art needs an operation*/Art is a **PRETENTION** heated in the TIMIDITY of the urinary basin.../IF EVERYBODY SAYS THE OPPOSITE IT IS BECAUSE THEY ARE RIGHT."¹⁰⁶ Rather bluntly, Tzara precedes Theodore Adorno in saying that art itself becomes a production, requiring some exchanged value ("operation"). To offer critique of this of art only encourages further exchange and commodity, further heating itself in the urinary basin. Dada presents itself as against art, against poetry, since these terms have only come to refer to productions engineered to easily sell.

Tzara makes this clearer later on when he talks of "the leap of images/above the regulations of the/*BEAUTIFUL* and its control."¹⁰⁷ Aesthetic value, however well it appeals to our sensibility of beauty and whatever else, become entities of commodity and fetish. When Tzara says that everyone says the opposite because they're right, it is to refer to the fact that orders of sense are what make things "right" or not. If we apply this kind of sense to notions of beauty, as criticism might aim to do, we fall under systems of control in the act of appreciating

¹⁰⁶ Tzara, "Proclamation Without Pretention," *Approximate Man and Other Writings*, 157-158, lines 5-30.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, lines 33-35.

art. To break out of it is to destroy sense and write nonsense, to destroy beauty and create ugliness, to destroy language, to destroy the poem, to destroy the poet.

In the Introduction to this thesis, I've mentioned Tzara's instructions to create a poem by simply cutting apart a newspaper. This type of methodology is apparent in a line like "macrocystis périfera embrasser les bateaux chirurgien des bateaux cicatrice humide propre"¹⁰⁸ (macrocystis perifera to kiss the boats boat surgeon scar clean damp)¹⁰⁹. The line doesn't make much of any sense as a grammatical sentence, and seems to say little of anything at all, as the newspaper method may imply. Yet Mary Ann Caws insists that in spite of the apparent randomness, "Tzara always claims for Dada creations an essential interior ordering, a 'constellation' of necessary clarity below the obvious surface."¹¹⁰ Furthermore, she points out that of the *Ving-cinq et un poèmes*, all 26 refer to color, 25 movement, 23 light, 21 direction/ordering, and 20 to geometry, often having multiple of these references.¹¹¹ Yet, she notes that "these thematic links never fall into any fixed (non-Dada) or predictable form or succession."¹¹² What could be useful in ordering all these images and links together with no consistency to it? What underlying order could be revealed from this apparent lack of order?

One possible order emerges in relation to gibberish as a stage in communication. Stephen Forcer, after quoting Lacan on the quality of playfulness found in a child first looking into the mirror, states that "Dada poems are written as if by a subject who is continually entering the symbolic order for the first time, repeatedly going through the...discovery of language and

¹⁰⁸ Tzara, "Le géant blanc lépreux du paysage," *Poesies*, 119.

¹⁰⁹ Translation by Mary Ann Caws, in Tzara, "White Giant Leper of the Countryside," *Approximate Man...*, 158. I think this translation does not represent elements of the poem very well in English, however (i.e. I would say "clean damp scar" at the end based on how adjectives work in French, since the current order is misleading as to where these adjectives might apply.)

¹¹⁰ Caws, *The Poetry of Dada and Surrealism*, 98.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

posturing...of speech.”¹¹³ Essentially, Tzara’s speech is as a baby’s gibberish, but at least one which has read the French dictionary a few times. I think it is no accident words like “macrocystis perifera”¹¹⁴ (the scientific name for a species of giant kelp found in the Pacific Ocean) are only a line after the gibberish of “mbaah nfounfa,”¹¹⁵ and yet followed immediately by the simple “embrasser les bateaux,”¹¹⁶ expressing the absurd image of kissing boats in an infinitive verb form, eliminating the ability for the verb to attribute itself to an actor. Language no longer signifies the speaker’s own thoughts or refers to physical things acting on one another, but has gained a solipsistic life of its own, signifying for its *own* sake. Obscure/technical terms are equated with the gibberish, while other forms of nonsense are found in the clashing of simple utterances paired haphazardly, without punctuation or real ordering.

It is telling that one of the more lucid moments in these poems is followed by the kind of abrupt change worthy of Montaigne, as follows:

le géant le lépreux du paysage
 s’immobilise entre deux villes
 il a des ruisseaux cadence et les tortues des collines s’accumulent lourdement
 ...
 l’ame et le rossignol tourbillonnent dans son rire — tournesol
 il veut cueillir l’arc-en-ciel mon coeur est une astérie de papier¹¹⁷

(the giant the leper of the landscape
 stands immobile between two towns
 he has rivers cadence and the tortoises of the hills heavily accumulate
 ...
 the soul and the nightingale swirls in his laughter—sunflower
 he wants to pluck the rainbow my heart is a paper starfish)¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Forcer, 53.

¹¹⁴ Tzara, “Le géant blanc lépreux du paysage,” *Poesies*, 119, line 6.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, line 5.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, line 6.

¹¹⁷ Tzara, *Poesies*, “Droguerie - conscience”, 127, lines 19-24.

¹¹⁸ Tzara, “Drugstore-Consciousness,” *Approximate Man...*, 162.

This passage conjures up images of this leprous giant, or giant (badly afflicted) leper¹¹⁹ reflecting rather mournfully, with talk of immobility and rivers cadence, a part of the isolated nature around him. This description climbs to overly sentimental levels (plucking the rainbow) before suddenly being interrupted by the narrator claiming to have a paper, starfish heart. Of course, this is only one interpretation, as maybe the narrator desires to pluck the sunflower. Or alternatively, the heart is a term of endearment referring to the rainbow, making it, “the rainbow, my heart, is a paper starfish.” The grammar which might help us find meaning is absent. Still, something about rainbows and hearts in this line seems to connote a sentimental quality however one reads it. Perhaps it leaves the reader to reflect on how despite what seriousness or “poetic”-ness the previous lines might display, they are revealed to be just as sentimental. We are suddenly jolted into the realization of being immersed in the language, and the triteness of that very immersion. This realization requires standing outside the immersion. This jolting pattern throughout the poems may lead one to finally jolt outside and come back into the order of language itself. Notably, this kind of jolting effect occurs in both the original French and English translation, suggesting this kind of effect lies outside the confines of a single language and order. Perhaps the reader is meant to take the potential sentimentality seriously and be swooned, yet the next stanza resorts to mocking the reader, leading me to suggest this reading is less likely.

Yet, despite the humor and play in Dada, many of these poems seem tragic and foreboding. Passages like the following describe something of a slave-trade nightmare:

...les barques avançant comme la divinité dans la chair
longuement

les ailes des flambeaux divisent les tuyaux de solitude les tympons d'airain et les clochers
le vent contraire
les veines solaires bandées de parchemin et les esclaves hurlent

¹¹⁹ It is impossible to really tell, since the translation suggests different associations with which word is first and either descriptive or subject, and the interjecting “le” (“the”) renders preferring either word as one of these useless.

mourir voir son fruit mort¹²⁰

(...the barques advancing like the divinity in the flesh
for a long time

the wings of flames divide the pipes of solitude the eardrums of brass and the steeples
the headwind
the solar veins bandaged with parchment and the slaves howl
to die to see his dead fruit)

Upon some brief research, I found the term “barque” was meant not only for a nondescript type of ship, but was used by Jean-François Champollion when translating hieroglyphs to refer to the type of ship which takes the dead to the afterlife.¹²¹ There is a sick irony that slaves are then riding these named ships through a hellish storm, as this divine trip has taken a detour to hell as per the colonial whims and imprisonments. This afterlife the slaves had hoped for is revealed to be a kind of dead, rotting fruit in the last line. Taking this as a kind of colonialist irony, it is as if the French had, in translating the language of the Egyptians, solidified the fate of the Africans, had changed their reality through language itself. In this interpretation, language must be transcended if there is any hope for the human mind’s attempts at liberation. Furthermore, just as their native tongue is made useless and the enslaved Africans must sell their tongues to a colonial language, their bodies follow, sold into oppressive and demanding slave labor. Their entire existence has been commodified, shipped as cargo and sold as a profit for their greedy White owners.

I am also struck by this “divinité dans la chair” (divinity in the flesh), as several of Tzara’s writings focus on images of corporeality. Recall the comparison of art to urine heated in a basin earlier in *Proclamation without Pretention*. He similarly condemns the reader: “quand tu

¹²⁰ Tzara, “Le sel et le vin” *Poesies*, 151, lines 9-14.

¹²¹ Gibson et. al, “Egyptian Temples.”

peignes consciencieusement tes intestins ta chevelure intérieure/tu es pour moi insignifiant comme un faux-passeport¹²² (when you consciously paint¹²³ your intestines your internal hair/you are for me insignificant like a false passport)¹²⁴”. He clearly gives importance to the body, yet in these negative images he is referring to the body as something disgusting. He speaks later in the poem of hearing “du jet-d’eau...le pipi (the pissing of a fountain),”¹²⁵ and in another of “la flora issue de la mort (flora from death).”¹²⁶ I read these sexually, namely for the yonic image of a fountain as well as the deadly flora, death relating to the jouissance. These vulgar depictions of sexuality might shock the reader of these poems who would expect flowery praises of love’s sweet beauty in rhyming couplets. Such a reader would, when faced with these descriptions, be forced to realize when expecting descriptions of sensual curves and radiating bodies that such bodies also produce excrement, ugliness, and death. Whatever divinity exists in the flesh must be a false and inconstant one, subject to the whims of how one looks upon the body.

When mourning the death of fellow surrealist Guillaume Apollinaire, Tzara wishes that “ON POURRAIT COMPRENDRE/la mort serait un beau long voyage/et les vacances illimitées de la chair des structures et des os¹²⁷ (WE COULD UNDERSTAND/death would be a beautiful long voyage/and an unlimited vacation from the flesh of structures and of/bones)¹²⁸”. The body is something to be transcended, another structure imposed on existence. Indeed, when one looks into the mirror, it is the bodily image, external and disgusting in comparison to his idealized self. Less trivially, the slaves in the ship above are descending, like this page, down to a hell of their

¹²² Tzara, “Mouvement,” *Poesies*, 121, lines 13-14.

¹²³ A pun, as it plays on the 2nd-singular verb forms of “to comb (peinturer)” and “to paint (peigner).”

¹²⁴ Tzara “Movement,” *Approximate Man...*, 160.

¹²⁵ Tzara, “Mouvement,” *Poesies*, 121, line 18.

¹²⁶ Tzara, “Droguerie - conscience,” *Poesies*, 127, line 15.

¹²⁷ Tzara, “La mort de Guillaume Apollinaire,” *Poesies*, 245, lines 15-17.

¹²⁸ Tzara, “The Death of Guillaume Apollinaire,” *Approximate Man...*, 180, lines 15-18.

lost autonomy. Their bodies are worked literally to death, often before reaching their new owner's field. When Tzara describes these slaves "divinity in the flesh," it is to refer to the flesh as a trap, and that far after the slaves skin has been charred from the "wings of flames" slavery carries them to, the souls of black folk can long for the rest only death can offer.

Dada poets have attempted destroyed "sense" in terms of codified understandings, but recognize that in doing so, they must also reach to destroy a second sense of "sense," that of corporeal perception and existence. Fellow poet Hans Arp was quoted having said Dada follows a "law of chance," which, "embraces all laws and is unfathomable like the first cause from which all life arises, can only be experienced through complete devotion to the unconscious."¹²⁹ Ko Won notes this sounds rather Taoist, what with an unfathomable from which all arises.¹³⁰ In trying to break from order, in trying to find a new order, the true allegiance for the Dada artist is a nihilistic "nothingness," but such a nothing that it gains its essence in a lack of essence. Things like beauty, logic, the body, they are all illusions of existence, a kind of thingliness which will inevitably pass and change only to return to the "nothingness" from whence it came. Tzara once claimed, "All is Dada...But the true dadas are against Dada."¹³¹ If one were to claim Dada as meaning something, then Dada has failed in destroying all senses of meaning. The word never had a specific meaning; it has been connected to the French word for a hobbyhorse, or a child's first words (also invoking patriarchal lineage), but I don't think applying denotative meaning to the word does it justice. Were one to repeat the word ad-infinitum, as the poets often did, they would find the word held less definition with each utterance, yet came to hold its own embodied

¹²⁹ Arp, Qtd. in Won, 97.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Tzara, "On Sweet and Feeble love," *The Dada Painters...*, 92.

“meaning” through sound, something that can only be sensed without logical sense. Dada is something to be “sensed” by its nonsense-ing nature, something the sense of meaning loses.

But something seems to contradict between the two forces of Dada’s corporeality and its echoes of the Tao’s enlightened nothingness. Sure, the body is something which transitions to death and decays eventually into nothing, but to resolve oneself to absolute nothingness would be to deny something of the human will Tzara speaks of when he says, “Dada was born of a moral need, an implacable will to achieve a moral absolute, of a profound sentiment that man, at the center of all creations of the spirit, must affirm his primacy over notions emptied of all substance, over dead objects and ill-gotten gains.”¹³² While nothing new, Tzara seems confused on what the foundation of Dada really is, whether it is a rejection of all substance, or the assertion of the substantive human will. Mary Ann Caws’s perhaps sides with the idea of substance, suggesting that, “The clarity and the assurance of totality so highly prized by Tzara...is finally perceived in its simple presence within the concrete world of natural objects, whose inner surface and depth (*La Face intérieure*) is identical with their exterior and universal reality.”¹³³ The will of Tzara’s could be interpreted to act so as to ensure this totality between internal and external being, and while perhaps the true totality is existing as nothing, pushing forward one’s will implies a sort of action in the world, an existence as *something*. Either Dada has an impact, or else it resorts itself to nothingness.

Consider the first. It would make sense for the Dada artists to make noise at the Cabaret Voltaire under this condition, to let out their inhibitions and merely act accordingly as they should, however disordered. Manuel L. Grossman talks about this kind of view when covering Tzara’s fascination with African culture:

¹³² Tristan Tzara, *The Dada Painters...*, 394.

¹³³ Caws, 135.

This primitive tone, characteristic of the poetry of both Pansaers and Tzara, seems to derive from their mutual attempts to destroy traditional language...No longer the center of the universe, man is forced, in these poems to compete with 'the unlimited bric-a-brac of things.' Like the primitives, these poets have made a kind of magical pact with nature. Everything in their poetry...speaks with its own voice, and the words which pour forth from these strange voices must be valued for their own particular resonance...¹³⁴

Yikes. It is vaguely interesting that Grossman's type of model starts to sound like the will and voice of the poet forces itself to its own submission to nothingness, but one which is in tune with "nature." However, it should strike my reader how much this reeks of colonial rhetoric and the image of the noble savage. As the rhetoric goes, this "savage" exists as if in a "pure" state, before he has been tainted by the "corruptions" of modernity. A word like "primitive" evokes associations of magic and naturalness (evident in the quote above), as if to say that because their technology is so much more basic, their life and culture hold something closer to the gods, as if they spoke the very Adamic tongues. This idealized perception is false, created out of idealizations from the colonizers themselves to justify some kind of innate "goodness" in human nature. The notion relies on the assumption that "primitive" cultures and technologies are somehow more basic and fundamentally "lesser," when in reality these "primitive" societies have had technologies just as intricate as White colonizers, with exception to perhaps farming. The notion gives a specific set of qualities which define "primitiveness," decides who is "primitive" and pure and who is not, requires colonized indigenous cultures to live to the colonizers standards or else be considered corrupted. It strips such cultures of their autonomy and legitimacy, portraying them only in the preconceived lenses of Western "goodness" and "purity." Grossman talks about these "primitive" cultures as if they weren't even actual people.

I do not think that the Dada poets escape this criticism either. Tzara was fascinated with African art in his day, and was well-known for being a collector. This even appears in his poetry,

¹³⁴ Grossman, *Dada*, 124.

the cries of “bouzdouc zdouc nfoùnfa mbaah”¹³⁵ being described by Caws as “phrases resembling African dialects,”¹³⁶ which is simply shorthand for blackface. According to Michael White, Tzara was noted for having supposedly translated poems from Aboriginal African sources, namely from the “Aranda” and “Loritja” people. However, it has been found that at the time of “translation,” the songs were already translated into German by Carl Strehlow, and so Tzara merely had to translate them from the German. Worse yet, Tzara read these aloud and published a transcription of the Maori “Toto-Vaca,” thought to have been his own work, and even claimed that it was his own writing.¹³⁷

This is a clear display of problematic actions in colonial issues, placing themselves over the African culture they supposedly vouch for. Even as I say this, some may try to disagree. The Dada poets were decidedly anti-colonial in the subject matter of their art, and in a way, their appropriation might spark more interest for African culture. Tzara himself was a notable curator of African art. However, his treatment of the culture seems more as a fetishization of the West’s perspective of what an African could be: some “primitive” supposedly more connected to nature and true self. The African poems were often positioned as “sound poems,”¹³⁸ suggesting their immersion in the culture was more from that of being an outsider than from one of attempted understanding. It is not as if the African influence is minor either, as identifying principles of Dada importantly include elements of rhythm, “tribalism,” and collage, all taken from an idealized version of what African culture is as motivated by colonial ideology. The idea is so hard-wired into the Dada poets, they don’t question it, and end up participating in the oppressive processes they were supposedly against, not because of their hatred of African culture, but

¹³⁵ Tzara, “Le géant blanc lépreux du paysage,” *Poesies*, 119, line 5.

¹³⁶ Caws, in Tzara, *Approximate Man*, 24.

¹³⁷ White, “Umba! Umba!...,” 166.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

because of their supposed love for it. Even apart from this, the issue of taking another culture and posturing it as “avant-garde” in one’s own culture is common and limits inclusion of this “other” into one’s own culture, the appropriator considered a “savant/cultural connoisseur,” and the “other” considered a mere “primitive.”

The issue comes when one considers whether nonsense as a revolutionary force can actually be conceived of without the appropriation and devaluation of “other culture.” We see in the previous chapter how Lewis Carroll idealizes the female child in order to reach his goals outside the current system, and what Dada does with African culture is not much different, setting Africa up as this pure standard without really understanding anything about it nor the diversity of the whole continent. Virginie Pouzet-Duzer talks about how 20th century avant-garde movements have come about by “cannibalising” another culture, the Surrealists consuming the Dadaists, and the Anthropophagia movement in Brazil consuming the Surrealists. The article suggests the true Dada feast was of the Italian Futurists, which would help explain away yet more of Tzara’s gibberish as machine noises (drrrrgrrrr). Tzara claims in his note on Negro art, “La bouche contient la puissance de l’obscur, substance invisible, bonté, peur, sagesse, création et feu¹³⁹ (The mouth contains the power of the obscure¹⁴⁰, invisible substance, goodness, fear, wisdom, creation, and fire¹⁴¹)”, and “la bouche” is that point where one eats the other. I imagine this was meant to play on colonial myths of cannibalism and those oft-unwarranted associations with the cultures colonized, but in associating “Negro Art” with cannibalism once again, it seems like another instance of the colonizers maintaining negative stereotypes of the “other.”

¹³⁹ Tzara, “Note 6 sur l’art nègre,” 21–22.

¹⁴⁰ Also referring to “dark,” with the obvious connection of blackness.

¹⁴¹ Possible pun on “crazy” when read aloud.

Adorno has a strong objection to surrealism which I think applies to Dada just as well. This primarily exists in surrealism providing its own theory for its artworks, making surrealist art “so innocuous as to leave no room for the *scandale*...what is intended to be nothing but a dream leaves reality unharmed, however damaged its image.”¹⁴² Similarly, if Dada claims itself to be nothing but nonsense, to just be a collection of random newspaper clippings, it may cause the effect of a wild dream only insofar as it allows the reader to then return back to an undamaged system of sense again. The viewer at the Cabaret marvels at the summonings of “savage” African spirits, at the chaos of three languages read aloud at once, but is able to laugh and assure themselves a safe return to standard society. In this way, Dada ensures that even if it is trying to identify with the abject of society and direct the joke in opposition of structure, it can only ensure a return to that very structure, can only deal itself along those lines.

Still, let’s consider the second option, that true Dada lies in complete loss of self and grounding oneself in any kind of reality or assumed facts, living as the sceptic Pyrrho. How could one imagine any kind of livable, revolutionary future? How could one build a new order without somehow resorting back to some commodifiable essence? Perhaps this is what Peretti meant when he claimed that the schizophrenic life is a clinical one¹⁴³, and to truly reject any form of sense and order is to reject the very body and external world, driving towards death. Adorno covers this issue in his opposition to surrealism, quoting Hegel who said, “The sole work and deed of universal freedom is thus *death*, a death that has no inner significance or fulfillment.”¹⁴⁴In striving for this kind of freedom in losing essence, the Dadaist also strives for

¹⁴² Adorno, “Surrealism Reconsidered,” 31.

¹⁴³ Peretti, “Capitalism and Schizophrenia.” To contextualize, this occurs during his critique that the individual with schizophrenia would not be able to create a new kind of order necessary to sustain revolution. I don’t doubt he also wishes to conflate Deleuze’s subversion of Lacanian schizophrenia with actual individuals with schizophrenia. This might suggest, however, that schizophrenia becomes contained by whatever dominant orders exist at the moment, namely the various institutions for individuals with mental disability, but perhaps also societal phenomena.

¹⁴⁴ Adorno, “Surrealism Reconsidered,” 33-34.

complete death of all meaning, a loss of fulfillment of any kind. This reads well with a type of Taoist/Zen idea of absolving oneself of all desire for achievement and fulfillment. But revolution must be conducted in the external world, which does not avoid established structures of language and dominance. Nonsense must overcome these external structures in order to have a revolution, a task Dada seems to fail at.

Meanwhile, well before the Dada revolution, Gertrude Stein was making a reputation as a modernist poet. She was ridiculed, condemned, and praised for her infamous phrases like, “A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.”¹⁴⁵ The phrase conjures notions of a rose changing or staying the same with each repetition and interpretation, a pun on *eros*, and even accusations of palilalia. The phrase is simple, cliched even in poetry, yet exists as something clearly disruptive of poetic tradition. Less relying on made-up words, she simply subverts common expectations of grammar, yet seems to imply meaning in spite of grammar’s absence.

One might wonder why I don’t focus on a supposedly more influential example of modernist nonsense, like Joyce’s prolix *Wake* or some of Pound’s antisemitic *Cantos*. But Stein herself beat me to this question, and said,

...it is the people who generally smell of the museums who are accepted, and it is the new who are not accepted. You have got to accept a complete difference. It is hard to accept that, it is much easier to have one hand in the past. That is why James Joyce was accepted and I was not. He leaned toward the past, in my work the newness and the difference is fundamental.¹⁴⁶

I’ve only quoted one passage by Stein thus far, but already her writing manifests this kind of newness, this inability to situate itself in a past. It’s not that the rose *was* a rose, it’s that it *is* one. History itself couldn’t help describe the rose, as Stein herself “recite[s] what history teaches.

¹⁴⁵ Stein, qtd. in Rettberg, 92.

¹⁴⁶ (“Transatlantic Interview” 29). Qtd. in Rettberg, *Ridiculous Modernism*, 153.

History teaches.”¹⁴⁷ No Aristotelian categories are needed to describe the rose, like that it has color or type, but merely that it is a rose. Very rarely does Stein’s writing occur in the past, being that it is always in the “*continuous present*,”¹⁴⁸ manifesting every moment that she is writing as well as when the reader is reading it. Not only this, but she repeats this present, as if the rose could be a rose (not implying future tense) any number of times and it still remain just as identical, different, erotic, or palilialiac as before. It is not as if her meaning becomes any more determined, unlike James Joyce, whose writing seems to, in spite of all its playfulness, seem very intent on restricting meanings, on at least leaving a breadcrumb of “enigmas” to eventually be figured out, should one devote himself to them. Stein, however, doesn’t need any of these shows of savant-hood and ability to define everything; she writes in a very basic English, and yet manages to make even less sense than Finnegans’ polyglot dreams.

Consider the text’s first paragraph/portrait:

A CARAFE, THAT IS A BLIND GLASS.

A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing. All this and not ordinary, not unordered in not resembling. The difference is spreading.¹⁴⁹

It seems like she’d attempt to describe the mentioned carafe, but nothing seems obvious in signifying anything about how we’d look at a carafe. Yet, certainly a carafe is made “in glass,” something as “a spectacle” in the middle of a table, and “not unordered” in its “system to pointing,” being as there is direction to how liquid, for instance, should leave a carafe. As a carafe serves wine, it would make sense that red should be “a single hurt color,” and liquid spreads out when poured or spilled. But this does not explain why the carafe is “blind,” “not ordinary, not unordered in not resembling,” and the words prod me further. The carafe is “a kind

¹⁴⁷ Stein, “If I Told Him...,” line 91.

¹⁴⁸ Grahn, *Really Reading Gertrude Stein*, 16.

¹⁴⁹ Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 11.

in glass and a cousin,” perhaps giving way to something of Wittgenstein’s family resemblances if I may ask my reader to stretch their memory so far back to the first chapter. Language itself appears as “nothing strange,” causes much violence (“hurt color”), and certainly is arranged in a semiotic system pointing to other interpretants, referents, etc. Of course, language is not ordinary when one realizes the ways our words carry history and structures of power. The words are certainly ordered in “not resembling” when they distract from the signified with various connotations a word may have. As such, differences in language spreads meanings, binaries, signifiers from their signifieds.

It would seem rather convenient that I would be reading this stanza and finding it to be exactly fitting for what I’ve been writing this whole thesis about. Others find many other meanings in these sentences. A simultaneously compelling and turgid example lies in Lisa Ruddick, who Eric Rettberg claims, “represents an extreme case of reading that depends on imaginative acts that delete and add to the words on the page...”¹⁵⁰ After reading her thesis, it’s not like I disagree with this assessment either, yet I cannot help but turn the pages of her analysis as she pulls vagina-crucifixes¹⁵¹ from the text and claims the duality of Stein’s account of patriarchal oppression and forbidden lesbian love, sometimes expressed by the same sentence.¹⁵² Indeed, it seems to match up well with Neil Schmitz’s framing of *Tender Buttons* as a fight in Gertrude Stein between her alliances to her brother Leo and her lover Alice Tolkas,¹⁵³ seeing as Ruddick’s search for a lost matriarch would seem to manifest somewhat in a figure like Alice’s (not the aforementioned Alice, mind you). Yet, to reach this reading might be omitting information from Schitz’s article, forgetting that he directs to getting “beyond the doubts and

¹⁵⁰ Rettberg *Ridiculous Modernism*, 147.

¹⁵¹ Ruddick, *Reading Gertrude Stein*, 225-226.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 211-213.

¹⁵³ Schmitz, “*Tender Buttons*, ‘notwithstanding’,” 104-105.

questions of what is and why is,”¹⁵⁴ and instead recognizing the possibility of “purely creative utterance.”¹⁵⁵

But then, how could the reader not ask what and why? Would it be so much better to derogatorily sign the whole thing off as complete nonsense, leave the book to be unread? What I find surprising asking the question of myself is that both suggestions help the reader determine the novel’s sense, be it by some often-complicated mess of meanings added most probably by the readers themselves, or by a lack of meaning from the one dismissively claiming nonsense. Both of these attempt to reach an ending, even as “Most every critic offers a caveat explaining the final impenetrability of the book.”¹⁵⁶ I would love to go through *Tender Buttons* and talk of all the boxes and breakages, roast beef and rubber cocks, but this seems to be entirely wrong. In explaining, we explain away, and lose the very text we so treasured. Indeed, I find my copy of *Tender Buttons* is unreadable, filled with pencil-palimpsests cramming their way into the body of text, the book buried under a large stack of secondary literature, all to find some meaning in it.

If it sounds like I have been dismissive of Ruddick, I must explain that I do find her various arguments compelling. For example, she claims, “a text can be polysemous and still have themes, or ‘patterns of meaning...the fact that a person’s language is mobile and polysemous does not mean that the person cannot at the same time be thinking ‘about’ various things, in ways that can be traced and interpreted,”¹⁵⁷ and even that Stein “compares her creativity to the embodied and feminine act of childbirth.”¹⁵⁸ It is as if, rather than killing her language with a

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 106

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Rettburg, *Ridiculous Modernism*, 144.

¹⁵⁷ Ruddick, 8.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 150.

very specific meaning, Stein imbues her words with a “feminine” multiplicity, an ability to instead of determining a single order, give birth to innumerable new orders.

This type of argument sounds essentialist from a feminist perspective. Stein herself was never a woman who acted in the “feminine act of childbirth,” and relying on this association conjures up oppressive structures once again. Just as the Dadaists claim to vouch for African culture by recreating stereotypes, so too would Stein supposedly be recreating stereotypes of binary gender norms in what Ruddick claims is a feminist writing. I think more than anything, this complication comes from codified explanations for what Stein’s revolutionary language is doing. In analyzing what she calls “the aesthetics of touch,” Rebecca Scherr explains:

I don't think of Stein's tactile aesthetic as an *inherently* feminine strategy. Because tactility is both considered a marginal (thus, feminine) sensory mode and its deployment can call attention to the power of visuality that often operates unnoticed, tactile aesthetics upset standardized representational practices and describe alternative aesthetic productions. From the point of view of the critic, “tactility” is a vehicle; it *facilitates* against-the-grain readings such as feminist and queer critiques...¹⁵⁹

If a gender-norm model is used to explain Stein here, I do not think it is because these gender norms are actually reinforced, but because these positive qualities to be sought for in an aesthetic of tactility, in multiplicity of meaning, have been codified to signify as supposedly “feminine,” as a deviation from the standard of male action. Indeed, an aesthetic of touch which Stein utilizes in *Tender Buttons* suggests direction towards an order of the body and emotions, whereas orders of the mind (logic) and stoicism have been considered the dominant and masculine traits. Belinda Bruner writes, “The anarchy of Stein lies in her proposition that the mind is not superior to the body and that intellect and body can coexist meaningfully.”¹⁶⁰ This dualist reliance on both mind and body can offer many different interpretations of her poetry.

¹⁵⁹ Scherr, “Tactile Erotics,” 195.

¹⁶⁰ Bruner, “A Recipe for Modernism...,” 415.

It seems as if Stein herself may anticipate this type of occurrence when she claims, “The change has come. There is no search. But there is, there is that hope and that interpretation and sometime, surely any s is unwelcome, sometime there is breath...”¹⁶¹ It is as if the very act of reading, finding meaning and hope and “interpretation,” seems to come about of its own accord, something thrust on us and into which we are seduced, as the section goes on to describe with breath some glittering which is “handsome and convincing.”¹⁶² Indeed, I am seduced into reading this book as an explication and deconstruction of orders of all sorts, be they patriarchal, linguistic, etc. But even in claiming one of these easily articulable meanings, it is as if I am seduced into language and the commodities of meanings once again rather than allowing for the many ways the text can affect me. The above passage could perhaps even be advocating for the seductive judgements of our breath and emotional retreat to hope. It is as if in reading, I cannot help but attempt to impose some phallic order of sense and meaning which only allows for multiplicity and inconsistency if a reader were to take the whole thing in. Eric Rettburg claims:

Stein repeatedly asked not that her readers devote their lives to reading her works but that her readers experience delight and enjoyment through her works. She did not want readers to carefully reconstruct the process through which she composed her poetry...She wanted her readers to find their own stories in it, even if those stories were different from her own. Stein's newness was not just a way of saying the old things in new ways but a revision of traditional notions of authorship and readership, a revision that keeps her work persistently new...¹⁶³

Stein has thus destroyed every essentially masculine, ordered element of the novel, down to the very notion of intended interpretation itself. Language has been stripped of its reference, and the reader is simply left with a wonderful system of play and various linkages across the text. Even if Stein had intended some order, she must have known it could not have been accessible to

¹⁶¹ Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 11.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Rettburg, *Ridiculous Modernism*, 153.

any reader. She instructs the reader to “Act so that there is no use in a center,”¹⁶⁴ a prophecy to Derrida’s own talk of centers which must always find themselves oriented toward ever new centers. It is as if the nothingness of which Dada speaks was already actualized in *Tender Buttons*. If any text represents the revolutionary nature of nonsense best, a text which has broken from any consistent order and interpretation, it must be this one.

What is that to say about the nature of revolution, then? It seems that the only way for revolution not to either reconstruct oppressive power (Dada) or become reduced and integrated into the system of commodity once again (Alice) is to have an entirely inaccessible meaning. It is possible for a reader to construct meaning from the text, but this would be as the counterculture has done to Alice, and therefore create a new structure of commodity. In fact, we have seen how any attempt to interpret and construct meaning for this text causes backlash from anyone else’s subjective interpretation. I cannot say I could ever hope to understand *Tender Buttons*, and I think it’s arrogant of anyone to say they really could, but I can’t deny being swept away by its beautiful language, having an emotional response to it. It is as if I am experiencing the text entirely internally without being able to articulate the text in logical terms that do the text justice; as soon as I do articulate, the text has become alien. As such, the break from order *Tender Buttons* proposes is one entirely inaccessible to our externally ordered selves, and fails on its inability to affect the external order. The part which has broken from the orders of commodity is also that part which cannot be proliferated through the market, which cannot organize people into revolutionary movement, since as soon as anything resembling it is, it becomes commodity and merely affirms the dominant power again. The schizophrenic drive is entirely isolated and incommunicable, and therefore ensures that the revolution will remain internal.

¹⁶⁴ Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 63.

Conclusion- In which I look to Derrida's "terrifying form of monstrosity."¹⁶⁵

I feel the same about every text I have analysed thus far in this thesis. In attempting to save Alice from Holbrook et. al's patriarchal readings, I find her yet distanced from some Alice I know inside. In justifying Tzara and then condemning him, he has become something apart from the poetry which caught my interest in the first place. I hope not to sound too reductive when I say that I wonder if Lenin and Tolstoy felt the same way upon seeing their respective nations set up under their own well-defined ideology. As we know, these are only two failed revolutions, and it seems as if every revolution becomes dated in its own due time.

Theorist Jacques Attali, after claiming that composition¹⁶⁶ would lead to the end of lack's stockpiling and production under capitalist labor, said,

*...there will be no more society without lack, for the commodity is absolutely incapable of filling the void it created...Living in the void means admitting the constant presence of the potential for revolution, music and death...Truly revolutionary music is not music which expresses the revolution in words, but which speaks of it as a lack.*¹⁶⁷

This quote articulates a sad fact about the external nature of revolutionary destruction of society's oppressive orders, that there is no order which could adequately provide for the needs to solve society's oppression. To live in a world with revolution and not with its mere potential (its ghost) is impossible, since to externalize, the revolution would need to gain representation, which "leads ineluctably to compromise and order,"¹⁶⁸ and therefore lack once again.

Revolution occurs with an internal realization of desire made external. The internal person strives for their ideal internal vision but has not enacted revolution until disrupting their

¹⁶⁵ Derrida, 293.

¹⁶⁶ His solution for solving the problems of capitalism as related to creating music through dissonance and noise, considering his book is an analysis of music. Yet, really, I think his model applies to any artform or production.

¹⁶⁷ Attali, *Noise*, 147.

¹⁶⁸ Attali, 62.

external world to bring about his own will. Yet, as soon as this internal is made external, it is not because the external has been overcome, but because the internal has been polluted by the external forces, been translated into language and changed through representation.

Writers like Carroll, Tzara, and Stein may attempt to strive for a change in the external order, attempting to express themselves in such order nonsensically to radically change said order. This is why nonsense must always be expressed in language, as it must receive some form of recognition, and therefore representation. Even in a dialectic synthesis, the dominant order must always be present in a synthesis, and so a revolution always ends in a compromised reflection of the previous order. Whatever elements of the opposition that are so revolutionary as to truly disrupt the dominant order are either absorbed into the order upon being stripped of all revolutionary elements, or are merely denied proliferation. Therefore, the revolution in the world of the external, as it supposedly manifests internally, will never arrive.

Nonsense has created noise in language, but since world leaders and exchangers of commodities can utilize nonsense, noise proves to be no solution against capitalism. If the Dadaists were serious about nothingness, they ought to know the true form of nonsense is not nothing, but silence. It entirely destroys the show of the Cabaret Voltaire, filled with silent pianos and muffled drums, mouths moving with no words to come out, but perhaps the show, the revolution, was created by the capitalist system anyways. These old texts become dated soon enough, and any which have not soon will find their way in as a commodity. The only way to oppose the system is to simply deny any production, to be silent.

I speak of a kind of death of the will, a denial of the desires which has been indoctrinated into our very modes of being. If action will only succumb to representation, then there are no modes of action that cannot become fetish. Baudrillard states, "What is essential is that nothing

escape the empire of meaning, the sharing of meaning.”¹⁶⁹ Meaning itself can only be an exchange, and the only kind of nonsensical, meaningless action is one which cannot be exchanged. But again, all forms of utterance can be exchanged. It is from Baudrillard I take the concept of silence, when he states,

...They, the animals, do not speak. In a universe of increasing speech, of the constraint to confess and to speak, only they remain mute, and for this reason they seem to retreat far from us, behind the horizon of truth. But it is what makes us intimate with them. It is not the ecological problem of their survival that is important, but still and always that of their silence. In a world bent on doing nothing but making one speak, in a world assembled under the hegemony of signs and discourse, their silence weighs more and more heavily on our organization of meaning.¹⁷⁰

There is something in the silence of animals which seems to have some influence, some weight which escapes any form of commodity. I risk sentimentality, but it is the kind of ineffable beauty which I find in reading Stein, the kind that makes me struck with a spell of inaction, of escaping the orders of lack only to transcend internally. It is perhaps this kind of idea to which Elisabeth Lenk refers in describing surrealism as “not...a future reality but rather an ever-present possibility,”¹⁷¹ a kind of enlightenment of mind in its ability to escape the external form of oppression to the internal space devoid of order.

This outlook is grim. The animals Baudrillard describes above are the kind in the slaughterhouses, only to become commodities through death. But unless one learns to revert to this mode of existence, it seems Adorno and Baudrillard promise that one will only reproduce the same systems of oppression which gave rise to lack and fetish and caused the need for revolution in the first place. A revolution of any kind of action can only be created by the oppressive society being revolted against. The only solution, then, is to reject the external world, ordered as it is by

¹⁶⁹ Baudrillard, 90.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Lenk, *The Challenge of Surrealism*, 133.

power, and resort to an internal transcendence. But whether or not that is even possible, this is probably where Baudrillard finds the need to declare himself a nihilist. But should Capitalism contain its own downfall, should acceleration of commodity take Capitalism closer to its Limit until it eventually collapses, perhaps state of silence ought to prevent us from preventing that collapse, and even yet, prevent our own collapse and learn to gain self-determination. The necessary revolution is not conducted against Capitalism at large, which is unsustainable, but against the way it has destroyed our internal being by infiltrating our language.

Bibliography

- Adorno, Theodor. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. Edited by J. M. Bernstein, Routledge, 2015.
- Adorno, Theodor. "Surrealism Reconsidered." *The Challenge of Surrealism: The Correspondences of Theodor W. Adorno and Elisabeth Lenk*. Edited/Translated by Susan H. Gillespie. University of Minnesota Press, 31-35, 2015.
- Alice in Wonderland*. Walt Disney Productions, 1951.
- Attali, Jacques. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Translated by Brian Massumi. University of Minnesota Press, 1985. *Theory and History of Literature*, Volume 16.
- Bud Townsend. *Alice in Wonderland: An X-Rated Musical Fantasy*. Cruiser Productions, 1976. Film. https://www.pornhubpremium.com/view_video.php?viewkey=1373934202
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Translated by Shelia Faria Glaser, University of Michigan Press, 1994. https://www.e-reading.life/bookreader.php/144970/Simulacra_and_Simulation.pdf
- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. Viking Adult, 1973.
- Breton, André. "First Surrealist Manifesto." *Le Manifeste du Surréalisme*. 1924. <https://tcf.ua.edu/Classes/Jbutler/T340/F98/SurrealistManifesto.htm>
- Bruner, Belinda. "A recipe for modernism and the somatic intellect in the Alice B. Toklas Cook Book and Gertrude Stein's Tender Buttons." *Papers on Language & Literature*, 45.4, 411+, 2009. https://link-gale-com.libproxy.uwyo.edu/apps/doc/A212939106/ITOF?u=wylrc_uwyoming&sid=ITOF&xid=2340ddcb.
- Bruns, Gerald L. *The Material of Poetry: Sketches for a Philosophical Poetics*. University Of Georgia Press, 2012.
- Caws, Mary Ann. *The Poetry of Dada and Surrealism*. Princeton University Press, 1970.
- Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*. Signet Classic, 2012.
- Cohen, G.A. "Deeper into Bullshit." *The Contours of Agency*. Edited by Sarah Buss and Lee Overton, MIT Press, 321-339, 2002.
- Colter, Rob. Personal Interview, 25 September 2019.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass, The University of Chicago Press, 1978.

- Ebert, Roger. "Alice in Wonderland." *RogerEbert.com*, 1976.
<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/alice-in-wonderland-1976>
- Eco, Umberto. *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*. Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Forcer, Stephen. *Dada as Text, Thought and Theory*. Routledge, 2015. Legenda Research Monographs in French Studies, Book 39.
- Frankfurt, Harry. *On Bullshit*. Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Gardner, Martin. *The Annotated Alice: 150th Anniversary Deluxe Edition*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2015.
- Gascoigne, David. "Boomboom and Hubaloo: Rhythm in the Zurich Dada Revolution." *Paragraph*, 33.2, 2010, pp. 197-214. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43151806.
- Gibson, Gayle, et. al. "Egyptian Temples." *Odyssey, Adventures in Archeology*. 2018.
http://www.odysseyadventures.ca/articles/egyptian_temples/egyptian_temples-text.htm
- Grahn, Judy. *Really Reading Gertrude Stein*. Crossing Press, 1990.
- Grossman, Manuel L. *Dada: Paradox, Mystification, and Ambiguity in European Literature*. The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1971.
- Holbrook, David. *Nonsense Against Sorrow: A Phenomenological Study of Lewis Carroll's Alice Books*. Open Gates Press, 2001.
- Johnston, Adrian. "Non-Existence and Sexual Identity: Some Brief Remarks on Meinong and Lacan." *LacanDotCom*, 2010. <https://www.lacan.com/nonexist.htm>
- Keats, John. *The Letters of John Keats*. Edited by Maurice Buxton Forman, 4th edition, London: Oxford University Press, 1952.
- Lenk, Elisabeth. *The Challenge of Surrealism: The Correspondences of Theodor W. Adorno and Elisabeth Lenk*. Edited/Translated by Susan H. Gillespie. University of Minnesota Press, 2015.f
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Edited by Bernard Williams. Translated by Josefine Nauckhoff, Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Peirce, Charles. *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology*. Edited by Robert E. Innis. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1985.
- Peretti, Jonah. "Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Contemporary Visual Culture and the Acceleration of Identity Formation/Dissolution." *Negations*, 1996.
http://www.datawranglers.com/negations/issues/96w/96w_peretti.html
- Rettberg, Eric. "Nonsense Language." *Eric Rettberg*, Wordpress, 2012.
www.ericrettberg.com/wordpress/nonsense-language/

- Rettberg, Eric. *Ridiculous Modernism: Nonsense and the New in Literature Since 1900*. University of Virginia, 2012. Dissertation.
<http://www.ericrettberg.com/wordpress/ridiculous-modernism/>
- Ruddick, Lisa. *Reading Gertrude Stein: Body, Text, Gnosis*. Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Scherr, Rebecca. "Tactile Erotics: Gertrude Stein and the Aesthetics of Touch" *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 18.3, 193-212, 2007. DOI: [10.1080/10436920701525570](https://doi.org/10.1080/10436920701525570).
- Schmitz, Neil. "Tender Buttons, 'notwithstanding'." *Primary Stein: Returning to the Writing of Gertrude Stein*. Edited by Janet Boyd and Sharon J. Kirsch. Lexington Books, 97-108, 2016.
- Strawson, Galen. *Things that Bother Me*. New York Review Books, 2018.
- Stein, Gertrude. "If I Told Him, A Completed Portrait of Picasso." *Selections: Gertrude Stein*. University of California Press, 2008. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/55215/if-i-told-him-a-completed-portrait-of-picasso>
- Stein, Gertrude. *Tender Buttons*. City Light Books, 2014.
- Svankmajer, Jan. *Něco z Alenky*. Channel Four Films, et al., 1988. Film.
- Tzara, Tristan. *Approximate Man and Other Writings*. Translated by Mary Ann Caws. Wayne State University Press, 1973.
- Tzara, Tristan. "Dada Manifesto On Feeble Love and Bitter Love." *391 Issues*.
<https://391.org/manifestos/1920-dada-manifesto-feeble-love-bitter-love-tristan-tzara/>
- Tzara, Tristan. *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*. Edited/Translated by Robert Motherwell. G. K. Hall & Co., 1981.
- Tzara, Tristan. "Note 6 sur l'art nègre." *Sic*, Sept.-Oct. 1917.
- Tzara, Tristan. *Poésies Complètes*. Edited by Henri Béhar. Flammarion, 2011.
- White, Michael. "Umba! Umba! Sounding the Other, Sounding the Same." *Dada Africa*, Scheidegger and Spiess, 165-171, 2016.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Edited by Marc A Joseph. Translated by C. K. Ogden and Frank Plumpton Ramsey, Broadview Press, 2014.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, 3rd Edition, The Macmillan Company, 1968.
- Won, Ko. *Buddhist Elements in Dada: A Comparison of Tristan Tzara, Takahashi Shinkichi, and Their Fellow Poets*. New York University Press, 1977.