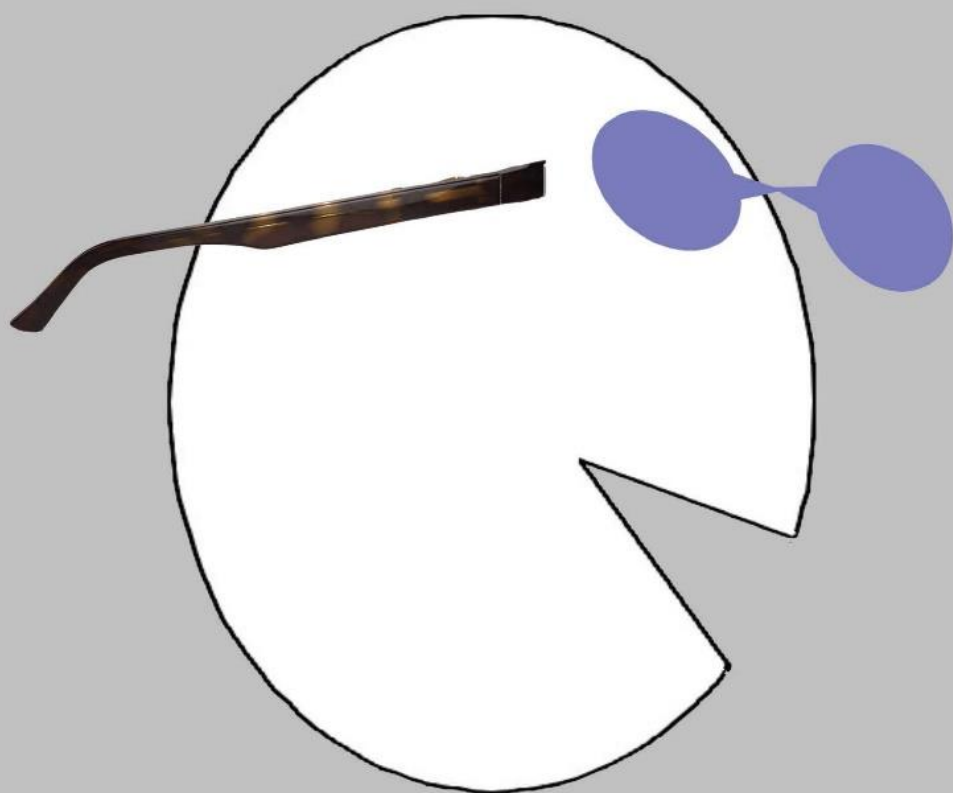


Appearances:

A Novel In Fragments



TOM BECKETT

APPEARANCES: A NOVEL
IN FRAGMENTS

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*Thomas Fink—poet, critic, painter, and friend—this book is
for you.*

“Only shallow people do not judge by appearances.”

--Oscar Wilde

The Ventriloquist,

the Hypnotist,

the Projectionist,

Desire,

the Subject,

and an (occasional) Other.

This Cast of Characters is a constellation,
bones of sky beneath a street.

*

Things, events begin in-the-midst,
in-between, under or over
other things/occurrences.

No I without You.

No I without Us and Them.

Nor without That *and* These.

They are our shadows

We theirs.

*

The Ventriloquist, the Hypnotist,
the Projectionist and the Subject
are making a semblance of love,
a skein of projections.

Desire and an Other walk in on them. This is a kind
of
throwing of voices,
planting of suggestions,
transference of images, thinking and/or feeling:
a knot is made, encountered,
cut or complicated.

*

Objects aren't simple.

Relations are objects too.

No one—person, creature,
thing, perception, object,
thought—isn't mediated, translated, by
something/someone else (to something/someone else).

In the mesh of object-relations one
is always in the midst of a mess.

*

What are surfaces?

What are networks?

What are knots?

*

The Ventriloquist, the Hypnotist and the Projectionist
are as real as flowers and quartz rock or lemons,
clouds or clocks, as real as a cartoonist or tattoo artist
inking, as real as a poet pounding its laptop. Desire is
something else.

*

“Something else.”

That’s where trouble starts. There’s something,
and then there’s something else.

*

Another Cast of Characters:

Science,

Art(hur),

Politics,

Love.

Add History and It to this list.

*

Fragment from an Interview with the Author

Q: You're a man, aren't you?

A: I'm told that I do a reasonable impersonation of one.

Q: Do you like art?

A: I *love* Art(hur).

*

What happens is sometimes indiscernible.

*

Dear Hypnotist,

Talking to myself last night

I discovered myself as Other
on the Projectionist's screen.

The last time *we* talked

I was entranced by you.

Call me.

Love,

The Ventriloquist

*

Dear Reader,

Have you never been ventriloquized?

I know I have.

Sincerely,

Desire

*

What does it mean to speak as if one is two persons?

*What does it mean to speak as if one is two **things**?*

Is everyone, everything, an overture or an aperture?

Both? More?

*

The Ventriloquist may be self-effacing, but it's no dummy.

Relax. The Hypnotist just wants to make a suggestion.

The Projectionist screens all of its calls.

Desire is itchy.

The Subject is lost in thought.

An Other feels itself (to be pursued).

*

The mirror images of the one who is you are
stammering that the mirror images of an Other are:

Science,

Art(hur),

Politics,

Love.

*

What are the essential confusions?

What degree of resolution is required?

*

The name of this intersection is *liminality*.

*

The constellations of Characters constitute
Exteriority's Chorus. It rumbles beneath the
pavement.

Overtures and apertures, voices, shadows, screens,
frames, alter egos. Sliding registers.

*

The Author--Ar(thur)?-- is thinking now about secret
identities, metafiction, and the textual/sexual
unconscious.

The Author (who?) is what?

Some essential aspect is indiscernible. Size figures.
Things, persons, events almost always loom larger or
smaller than one thinks.

*

Twenty Recognitions

1. Information is not thought.
2. Plot is not writing.
3. Writing is not nothing.
4. Nothing is not Desire.
5. Desire is not not History.

(To be continued.)

*

Ar(thur) is mulling scenarios. Art(hur) is humming and scratching an itch. Art(hur) has attachment issues. Art(hur) is aroused. Art(hur) is anxious. Art(hur) is a bundle of overtures and apertures. Art(hur) is an aporia. Art(hu)r is just barely discernible, but Art(hur) is here. Art(hur)'s not going anywhere (yet).

*

The world one inhabits is a mutating list poem.

The world one excoriates is a mutating list poem.

The world one dissolves in is a mutating list poem.

*

Twenty Recognitions (continued)

6. Anything is happening.
7. Rules change.
8. Change *rules*.
9. Everything is fictional.
10. Everything is real.
11. The world is incomplete.
12. Seeing is conceiving.

(To be continued.)

*

The Ventriloquist, the Hypnotist and the Projectionist hang out at the Cave.

The Cave is a basement-level dive bar. It has no windows. Its walls are painted black.

The Ventriloquist, the Hypnotist and the Projectionist constitute a performance art power trio known as Vaudeville without Organs (Vw/oO).

The Cave is where Vw/oO plots its “projects”.

Vaudeville without Organs’ past projects have included (but were not limited to):

- A series of thought experiments which will absolutely not be disclosed
- A series of thought experiments which may be disclosed at a later date

*

The Subject is all over the map. Art(hur) is all over the Subject. *It*

goes with the territory. Art(hur) is lost.

*

The Projectionist's inner life proceeds from a chiaroscuro of perception and sensation. The Projectionist's working vocabulary consists of shadows.

The Projectionist's outer life exceeds what it knows.

*

Word is saving *Appearances*.

*

The Ventriloquist is an extremely self-conscious, psychosexually bifurcated entity. The Ventriloquist is polyamorous. The Ventriloquist becomes aroused when a dummy sits in its lap.

*

The Hypnotist is a poor taker of notes and a terrible typist. And yet, the Hypnotist functions as the secretary, the keeper of Minutes, for Vaudeville without Organs.

*

Desire instructs the Subject to undo itself.

*

The Subject wears a mask

it calls "coherence".

The Subject is a map

drawn by Desire.

The Subject is a bath drawn

and drained (over and over again).

*

One's Other

is different

from any other.

*

Science is a sieve,

a grid

things fall through.

*

Art(hur) is a screen
and a rain cloud,
a sustained chord,
somebody's Other,
perhaps a cello
or a cockroach.

*

Politics is no longer seeing History.

*

Love sucks

the sense of things.

It's like Space

and Time

in that way.

But never forget:

Love is a character, too.

Just like History.

*

History is what substances are.

History is a blind spot among blind spots.

History has personal problems.

History has ADHD.

*

It.

It.

*

Twenty Recognitions (continued)

13. Meaning is constellational.

14. Everything translates.

15. Nothing is entirely translatable.

(To be continued.)

*

Back to the Cave. Vaudeville without Organs
(Vw/oO) deep in its thought schemes. The
Ventriloquist, the Hypnotist and the Projectionist
entangled in cross-purpose representations,
disordering their senses and rearranging each other's
sentences.

*

The Author is the trace of a noun embracing Art(hur).
It was going to write something different and then
forgot. Forgetting is an aid to writing (sometimes).

Beyond the Author's window is a blinding swirl of
snow.

*

**Fragment from the Minutes of a Vaudeville without
Organs Session at The Cave**

Ventriloquist: What is this thing I am speaking
speaking through? Who speaks speaking and what is
spoken to?

Hypnotist: What is this thing I am suggesting suggesting to you? Anyone have any suggestions?

Projectionist: What is this thing I am showing showing you? Anyone here from the "Show Me State"?

*

Art(hur) sees the Subject everywhere. In everything.

*

IT!

*

History is no angel.

*

Love is overtures and apertures.

*

Politics is talking smack about History.

*

Art(hur) has more than the officially recognized
number of senses.

*

Science moves like an experiment in navigation. All of its body's sutures are, sooner or later, on view.

*

The Other wants to be Art(hur).

*

The Subject comprises more than less negative space. The Subject cannot be televised. The Subject appears to itself as a palimpsest built up of layer upon layer of nearly invisible writing.

*

Desire *can* be seduced.

*

The Projectionist thinks of itself as a maker of aphorisms, a maker of embryos and weather systems.

*

The Hypnotist thinks of itself as a suggestion box.

*

The Ventriloquist thinks of its dummy as an extension of itself.

*

Introducing a New Character

Art(hur) is in a new relationship: with The Virtual.
The Virtual is enthralling and sexy.

Vaudeville without Organs is also smitten by the
Virtual. Each member of Vw/oO experiences The
Virtual as a different resonance:

for the Ventriloquist it is as a shimmering voice;

for the Hypnotist it is as a just out of reach memory;

for the Projectionist it is as a monochrome rainbow.

But for Art(hur), poor Art, the Virtual is the real
thing. Art(hur) is in love (not Love).

Love's smirking.

Art's practice is to pursue the Virtual, nonetheless.

*

All of the Characters are stumbling in their attempts to dance before The Virtual.

The Author also.

Art(hur) thinks it's awful.

The Characters are awe-filled.

*

Twenty Recognitions (continued)

16. Puns are medicine, but not without side affects.

17. "Effects" and "affects" have a tendency to elide.

18. One can be effectionate.

(To be continued.)

*

The Author, Art(hur),
and the Other
have a tendency to elide.

*

Twenty Recognitions (continued)

19. Everyone is an oxymoron.

(To be continued.)

*

The Virtual is in the midst of an appearance but seems inaccessible. The Virtual is hot. The Virtual walks in beauty like a pixelated vision of the Real (in and out of focus).

*

The Author is recording its realization that the Real cannot be introduced as a Character.

*

The Author is recording its revised realization that the Real *must* be introduced as a Character.

*

The Subject nests in others. Others subject it.

*

What is a Character? – Melody? -- Rhythm? --
Algorithms?

*

Every Character is haunted by other potential
Characters. And past Characters as well.

*

Is every Character a smokescreen for _____?

Or are the Characters what one does not perceive
when one perceives them?

*

The Real and the Virtual

are locked

in a tight embrace. Doing the imaginable.

*

The Expanded Cast of Characters as List Poem

The Ventriloquist

The Hypnotist

The Projectionist

Desire

The Subject

An (occasional) Other

Science

Art(hur)

Politics

Love

History

It

The Virtual

The Real

*

Order, and all of its

false cognates, is contingent.

*

Vaudeville without Organs comprises at least 7 entities: the Ventriloquist, the Hypnotist, the Projectionist, Vw/oO as it is *for* the Ventriloquist, Vw/oO as it is *for* the Hypnotist, Vw/oO as it is *for* the Projectionist, and Vw/oO as it is *as* totality.

*

Desire, the Subject and an Other are folding into one another. Like interlocking psychosexual origami.

*

Science, Art(hur), Politics and Love have started a reading group. The first text they intend to discuss is the Author's *Vanishing Points of Resemblance*.

*

Of It, but not It, History does not coincide with It.

It _____ extends _____ unfolding
and unknown.

*

~~That being said,~~ the Virtual and the Real are
inseparable.

*

Somewhere someone is drowning in invisible ink,
choking on unheard words.

*

The Author is heard to mutter: "The Characters are
troublesome, but but that is *my* problem."

*

The Subject cannot get past this conundrum/koan:
"How does one escape to where one *is*?" Is presence
the pretense of stability?

*

Desire almost always feels uneasy.

It just wants to be *occupied*.

*

The Virtual is one
thing and another.

Here *and* there.

Every body

is virtual

in its own way.

*

Twenty Recognitions

20. What's sensual isn't always consensual.

*

Fragment from an Interview with the Author

Q: Where did/does narrative begin for you? And what is it, anyway?

A: Well, not with television.

It's beads spilling off of a necklace, I guess. It's the gradual build-up and eventual eruption of a volcano, I suppose.

Watch out for those beads. Don't stand too close to the rim.

*

Repetition: prison or prism?

*

The Ventriloquist is spoken for. Its intended, the Dummy, waxes philosophically about this: "We two are wholly conduit."

*

The Hypnotist is getting sleepy. Very sleepy!

*

The Projectionist sees Pronouns everywhere.

*

Desire frequently
changes its mind.

Sometimes it likes
to kick the Subject
in the pants.

Sometimes it likes
to kick it
and chillax.

*

The Other
and the Subject
can be represented
as a perforated
feedback loop.

*

Science and Art

are exchanging clothing.

Science has just stepped
into Art's underpants.

Art thinks about
pleasuring itself.

*

Now Politics is seeing Love.

*

History can't quite get over It.

*

The Virtual and the Real
are often mistaken

for one another.

Separated at birth?

*

Vaudeville without Organs is contemplating an intervention. The Ventriloquist, the Hypnotist and the Projectionist have assembled in the Cave.

Ventriloquist: What is to be done?

Hypnotist: We must occupy...

Projectionist: ...ourselves!

*

Fragment from an Interview with the Author

Q: What can writing do that you can't?

A: Give everything away.

*

Twenty Recognitions

1. No thing is endless.
2. Nothing is endless.

(To be continued.)

*

Somewhere a projection, a ventriloquist's dummy,
and a hypnotee walk, are carried, and stagger into a
bar.

*

The Author remembers being circled by constellations of zombies and being unafraid. This is amazing to one who has always, in most circumstances, been afraid.

*

Twenty Recognitions (continued)

3. Questions are often more interesting than answers.
4. Beginnings and endings are braided together.

(To be continued.)

*

The Author is flat on its back on a driveway in a suburban neighborhood. Is it asleep? Or dead?

The Ventriloquist is making a chalk outline of the Author's body while the Projectionist looks on.

The Hypnotist comes upon this scene and says, "Don't forget to add a speech balloon to your drawing." The Ventriloquist complies. Whereupon the Hypnotist intones, "Arise."

The chalk outline, speech balloon attached, struggles to its feet, leaving the Author behind in its dust.

*

The chalk outline has become the Chalk Outline, the darling—the *project*--of Vaudeville without Organs.

This is an important turning point. Ta-dah!

*

What is the Chalk Outline but a bounded space? It is not the Author. It is not an archetype. And the Author has nothing to say about it.

*

Vw/oO has made the Chalk Outline integral to its plans. The Chalk Outline is a statement, a proposition, an Event, maybe an intervention, but not a tabula rasa.

*

Chalk Outline Observations

The Chalk Outline is a trace of the Author; it shouldn't be confused with the Author, but it can be confused with almost anything else.

The Chalk Outline might be confused with a comic book character. Or a crime scene.

The Chalk Outline can support almost anyone's projections. Without any of them of necessity sticking.

The Chalk Outline which can be spoken is not *the* Chalk Outline.

*

The Chalk Outline, at times, seems to envelop much more than it can contain.

*

The Chalk Outline is
(at once) a frame,
a territory
and an unrealized potential.

*

The Chalk Outline
is not unlike a ghost
with no memory.

*

Things cohere

in ways that experiences don't.

The Projectionist is given to referring to the Chalk Outline as "Miss Thing."

The Author is missing.

*

Vw/o Organs Performance Text

The Cast of Characters assembles to encircle the Chalk Outline. Each cast member, in its turn, opines and/or directs remarks or questions to the Chalk Outline and one another --

The Ventriloquist: I made you.

The Hypnotist: I called you forth.

The Projectionist: I attended your creation.

Desire: Leave reality!

The Subject: Who is Reality?

An (Occasional) Other: You are the vanishing point I aspire to be.

Science: What are your parameters? Are you more than a perimeter? What is inside you? What's your edge?

Art(hur): There is so much room in you!

Politics: I want to see you against something or someone.

Love: I see you.

History: What's behind you?

It: I'm speechless. You're so *present*.

The Virtual: You are...you are...

The Real: ...you are both a portrait and a dream.

*

The Chalk Outline exhausts definition.

*

The Chalk Outline is not noticeably gendered.

*

Vaudeville without Organs eagerly awaits the filling and re-filling of the Chalk Outline's speech balloon.

*

Twenty Recognitions (continued)

5. Knowledge emerges in retrospect.

6. The future is behind one.

(To be continued?)

*

The Chalk Outline appears agitated, jittery.
Enough chalk dust has aerosolized around its lines
that it appears to be wrapped in an aura.

Speaking of lines, lines and graphic marks are
beginning to assemble inside of the Chalk
Outline's speech balloon.

The Cast of Characters are as one: rapt.

*

As the Chalk Outline's words begin to come
together, Vw/oO separates from the circle of their
fellow characters, huddle together and buzz.

*

Hypnotist: What will appear?

Projectionist: Only (sigh!) signs.

Ventriloquist: Our script!

*

The First Speech Balloon

HOW MUCH OF ONE'S LIFE IS FICTIONAL?

*

The Second Speech Balloon

NATURE SCARES ME. SO DOES
PARAPHRASE.

*

The Third Speech Balloon

AM I YOUR BLIND SPOT?

*

As soon as each message is registered, it melts into the air breathed by VwoO and the rest of the Cast of Characters, where it is absorbed by their lungs and into their bloodstreams.

*

The Ventriloquist, Projectionist and Hypnotist walk into the Cave. The bartender refuses to serve their collective neuroses.

The Hypnotist: I believe that you know that you will.

Bartender: OK. What can I do for the lot of you?

*

The Chalk Outline is still surrounded by the Cast of Characters (minus Vaudeville without Organs which is deep in its cups on the cusp of something in the Cave).

The Chalk Outline is trembling like a saint in the grip of its Creator.

*

The Chalk Outline fills and refills its speech balloon but not without a cost to itself. Chalk dust flies in the course of filling, erasing and refilling the balloon. And the dust settles not where it began. The Chalk Outline qua outline is becoming dimmer even as it “speaks.” Even as its utterances obtain a certain vibrancy—it, the Chalk Outline, is fading away.

The circle of Characters is becoming alarmed.
Vw/oO, of course, has no idea what is happening.
It appears to be missing in action.

*

Vaudeville without Organs has not been inactive.
Karaoke has been sung. (Ironically several
backing tracks feature Hammond B3s.) Games of
pool have been played. Libations have been
quaffed. Snacks have been consumed.

And the Ventriloquist has gone out on an errand.

*

Slowly, gradually, inevitably the Chalk Outline
has been reduced to a pile of dust and to a handful
of utterances. There are disputes about some of
what the Chalk Outline "said" and disputes about
all of what was meant, all of what might be drawn

from the experience of the Chalk Outline's appearance and disappearance. There is, however, no disputing what its last utterance was:

AM I ONLY THE SUM OF MY EXPRESSIONS?

*

The Return of the Ventriloquist

Still unaware of the demise of the Chalk Outline, as are the other members of Vw/oO, the Ventriloquist has returned with an unopened package of sidewalk chalk.

*

The State of Things (Everyone Now Convened at the Cave)

The Ventriloquist: I want to make a tracing of
Desire.

The Hypnotist: I want to make a suggestion that will
have a real consequence.

The Projectionist: I want to show the shadows of the
Real.

Desire: I want everything and more. What did the
Chalk Outline want? Trace me!

The Subject: I want to be known.

An (occasional) Other: I want to be known for what I
am on the inside. Keep that chalk away from me.

Science: I want to know what can be discovered
about, what can be learned from, the experience that
was the Chalk Outline.

Art(hur): The Author, whatever its qualities, was
subsumed by the Chalk Outline. And now it has been
reduced to dust.

Politics: The dust has been collected in this urn I hold before you. We must decide what is to be done with it.

Love: I want to write our names in it.

History: The Chalk Outline must be remembered, reconstituted for posterity.

It: Things of the mind, things in the world are rightly confused. As am I.

The Virtual: Things of the mind?

The Real: Things in the world?

*

Desire is being traced by the Ventriloquist on the barroom floor. The lineaments of Desire are becoming indistinct. Desire is becoming a Chalk Outline. A speech balloon will soon be added. Chalk dust is in the air.

*

Desire appears to be out of the picture now. The Chalk Outline is gearing up to “speak.”

*

The Subject is contemplating the Chalk Outline, *this* Chalk Outline, as a thing apart. Sometimes the Subject inadvertently refers to the Chalk Outline as the Chalk Circle. It is not a circle. Though, in a sense, it could be said to encircle or surround the space Desire once took up.

Can Desire be located? Has Desire been relocated?

*

The new Chalk Outline’s first speech balloon:

I WILL BE UNDONE BY MY DISCOURSE.

*

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT DESIRE

The Ventriloquist: I made what surrounds Desire speak.

The Hypnotist: You all will want to act upon what I suggest to you about Desire.

The Projectionist: Oh Desire, don't you know that what I see or say is what you are?

The Subject: I can only think myself to be somewhere between the Chalk Outline and Desire. Where I actually am must be beyond me.

An (Occasional) Other: You want to subsume me. Just like the Ventriloquist did Desire, and as was done to the Author before.

Science: Sometimes I think a thing is the sum of its appearances. Whether I speak of a Chalk Outline or an Author or Desire.

Art(hur): Sometimes I think that Desire constitutes the sum of my failures.

Politics: I think the fact that we can't account for either the Author or Desire means that we don't live in sum-times, times that add up. That we are always already less than we aspire to be.

Love: I have the sense that the lot of you represent the subtraction of Desire.

History: What happens in the moment doesn't stay there. Consider Desire.

It: I'm not sure what or who I am.

The Virtual: Presence is everything. Except Desire.

The Real: Absence is what I fear most of all. After Desire.

*

It's unusual for more than one person to experience the same dream at the same time. That, however, is not the experience of Vaudeville without Organs. They do it all the time. It is an important aspect of their art.

The Hypnotist, the Projectionist and the Ventriloquist all dream that a figure who resembles the Author shows itself to them but then sheds its skin and is revealed to be Desire.

*

Vw/oO's collective dreaming about Desire's return coupled with the Author's continuing absence are topics of concern among the remaining members of the Cast of Characters.

These inquiring minds want to know why their own dreams are composed of such significantly different things, events and persons.

*

The Subject: I dreamt about an Other.

An (Occasional) Other: I dreamt about being subjected to another.

Science: I do not remember dreams.

Art(hur): In my dream, something—*It*--came into me. And I became something else. Something other than what I currently am.

Politics: I dreamt of an eloquent Chalk Outline leading an army of Chalk Outlines.

Love: I dreamt that I laid down upon the Chalk Outline and that Desire was returned to us as the Author of us all.

History: I am only just awakening from a series of nightmares. I can only remember parts of them. As if through a gauzy haze.

It: My dream was impenetrable. I felt as if it were rejecting me.

The Virtual: I dreamt of you, really.

The Real: I virtually dreamt of you.

*

Just because Vaudeville without Organs dreamt that Desire emerged from the costume, skin, or cocoon of the Author doesn't mean it is so. Nor does it mean that it isn't.

*

The Ventriloquist's Dummy has disappeared (without a trace).

*

The lines of the Chalk Outline have begun to undulate. The Chalk Outline now looks as if it had been traced with a shaky hand.

What might this mean?

Small clouds of chalk dust have assembled in the air above the Chalk Outline. The Cast of Characters cannot take their eyes off of them.

First one and then the other clouds begin to rain chalk dust particles. All of the particles land in a synchronized way on the Chalk Outline's speech balloon and start to form letters and words.

*

Twenty Recognitions (continued)

7. Some differences are absolute.
8. Some differences are
incomprehensible.

9. Some differences are mistaken for resemblances.

10. Some differences are the same.

(To be continued.)

*

The dust has settled. The Chalk Outline has stopped moving. These words come together within the speech balloon:

DESIRE

WROTE THIS.

*

And, almost as soon as it appeared, that speech balloon message disappeared and more synchronized chalk dust—the last of it—fell from the sky onto the newly blank speech balloon. These words were formed:

DESIRE IS

THE ONLY
AUTHOR.

*

The Ventriloquist was feeling conflicted.

The Projectionist felt overshadowed.

The Hypnotist felt very sleepy.

The Subject started thinking about sex.

An (occasional) Other would glance in the direction
of the Subject from time to time.

Science wanted to examine the speech balloon, but
the message was already disarticulating itself.

Art(hur) doesn't know how anything works, but
wants to work with what can be found, and so is
searching for unarticulated chalk dust.

Politics sees the Chalk Outline as a contested site.

Love sees words, having fallen as chalk dust from the sky, as a weirdly compelling sort of discourse.

History is a mysterious figure.

It is one too.

The Virtual yearns to become a Chalk Outline's speech balloon.

The Real wonders about Vaudeville without Organs, wonders if there will soon be another collective dream.

*

Vaudeville without Organs cannot sleep.

*

Is Desire constituted out of its expressions?

Is it its own Author?

*

“There’s a whiff of poetry in the air,” says Vaudeville without Organs as one.

“Ugh. Who farted?” asks the Real.

“Me,” the Virtual said.

*

The Chalk Outline is the worse for wear after its last undulations. Its lines are degrading. It is beginning to fade away.

Vaudeville without Organs is staring at it intently. The speech balloon is empty and yet Vw/oO believes it can see words forming there.

Vaudeville without Organs still cannot sleep.

There’s still a “whiff of poetry” in the air.

The Virtual is following Vaudeville without Organs.

*

The Cast of Characters (minus Vw/oO and minus the Virtual, not to mention Desire and the Dummy) have assembled in the bar to assess the current status of things.

The Subject: The Chalk Outline appears to have disappeared. Just as its predecessor did. I feel frightened, formless.

An (Occasional) Other: You aren't anything less than you were before all of this. Can I trace you?

Science: I'd like to trace the Other tracing the Subject and conduct an experiment.

Art(hur): If you do that, then I want to fill in with color the resulting Chalk Outlines.

Politics: We assembled here to discuss "the situation". So far, after the announcement of the

Chalk Outline's disappearance, only fear and wishes have been enunciated.

Love: I don't know if any of you are listening, but I believe that if you trace me...Well, I could be your best hope. Trace me.

History: The Author seems to have disappeared. As has Desire. If the past is prologue, Love, things don't look promising for you. Or maybe for any of us, for that matter.

It: The thing is...

The Real: What?!

*

An (occasional) Other begins to trace the Subject on the sidewalk outside the bar. The sky rumbles and rain begins to fall.

The tracing is interrupted and erased by the cleansing rain. An (occasional) Other and the Subject return to the Cave.

"Next time," the Subject says, "I'll trace you."

*

"Trace *me*," Love repeats again and again.

*

The rain has stopped. Love has laid down upon the sidewalk outside the bar. Love has a piece of sidewalk chalk in each hand. Pink chalk in one hand, white chalk in the other.

Love is ambidextrous. And very flexible.

That said, Love is finding it difficult to trace itself. But Love persists. Love tries.

The rain returns

and Love returns

to the bar.

*

The Cave is busy. The Cave is buzzing with conversation, buzzing with concerns.

Love sits alone in the midst of the buzzing. Love sits alone and hums.

*

Twenty Recognitions (continued)

11. Narration is only part of the story.
(To be continued.)

*

Vaudeville without Organs believes as one that the idea of the Chalk Outline has assumed a reality beyond what either of the two previous “real world” iterations of Chalk Outlines achieved.

What happened to Desire, not to mention the Author, is a concern. Particularly for the Ventriloquist who initiated the tracings and now is begging to be traced.

*

Vaudeville without Organs has returned to collective dreaming. Its sleep is haunted by pile upon pile of blurring Chalk Outlines, haunted by fading palimpsests.

*

The Virtual and the Real are walking hand in hand on a sidewalk that leads back to the Cave . They are conversing in an intimate way.

They experience a moment, stop and embrace. The Virtual imagines the Real becoming a vertical Chalk Outline with a speech balloon emerging from its mouth.

This imagined Chalk Outline is different in all ways from its previous iterations. This Outline is comprised of X's. It looks like stitching.

The Virtual considers this and realizes: Seaming is Being.

*

Meanwhile, back at the Cave, Art(hur) is busy with mortar and pestle. Sidewalk chalk is being crushed to powder. Art(hur)'s been busy doing this for over an hour. Soon there will be enough powder and the next step can be taken.

*

There is a raised wooden platform in front of the juke box at the Cave. The Real and the Virtual are dancing on it now. Their dancing takes the form of holding one another close and performing little box steps. Their steps mirror one another. From time to time a twirl is ventured.

*

Facts about the Cave. The Cave's walls are painted black. Its ceilings are mirrored. Over the dance platform, on which the Real and the Virtual are dancing, a faceted disco ball spins.

*

The three members of Vaudeville without Organs are asleep, heads down on a table. They dream as one and snore in 3-part harmonies.

Vaudeville without Organs' rumbling tune is the music the Real and the Virtual are shuffling and

sometimes twirling to on a platform in front of a silent but soon to be wailing jukebox.

*

A juke box is a treasure trove of information about the sort of establishment it exists within. Herewith follows a list, alphabetically sorted, of a few of the song titles* in the Cave's juke box:

A.

Algebraic Bric-a-brac Breakdance

B.

Badiou's Bad IOU Blues

C.

Chalk Songlines

D.

Data Dump Duet (the remix)

E.

Erotic Ergonomic Prelude

F.

Forgotten Fantasies

G.

Ghost Whirl

H.

Homophone Nights,

Haiku Zydeco

I.

Irregular Interventions

J.

Joint Custody Epistemology

K.

Karmic Suicide Stomp

L.

Language Gamelon

M.

Multivariate Melodies

N.

Niche Notes

O.

Open Letter Operetta

P.

Postmodern Polka

Q.

Quadratic Cha-cha

R.

Reel for the Real

S.

Sonic Shadows

T.

The Tingle Tango

U.

Unheimlich Maneuvers

V.

Virtual Memories

W.

Waking Windows

X.

XXL Largo

Y.

Yo-yo Mass

Z.

Zombified Zydeco

* All songs listed were written, performed and recorded by Vaudeville without Organs.

*

Vaudeville without Organs' heads raise as one. Their sonorous snoring has ceased.

The Virtual and the Real freeze on the dance platform.

Vw/oO dreamed collectively but the Ventriloquist, Hypnotist and Projectionist each recall only fragments of the dream.

The Ventriloquist: I had the sense that I was being bombarded by language which I couldn't understand. Much of which I was myself speaking.

The Projectionist: Yes. Plus I felt as if my whole being was trembling. It was as if my soul flickered.

The Hypnotist: All of what you have both said was true to my experience also. But I also felt that I was waiting, waiting for my marching orders to arrive. I had no sense of what those orders might be. Other than that they would be momentous.

*

The Virtual and the Real are motionless now, locked in a tight embrace, gazing into one another's eyes.

*

As if exhausted by their efforts to piece together their shared dream, Vaudeville without Organs once again falls asleep and begins to dream anew. It dreams that

they are all walking in lockstep within the perimeter of a Chalk Outline which has taken the form of a labyrinth. Each step our intrepid dreamers take enlarges the size and complexity of the labyrinth. They are growing afraid, beginning to panic.

Vaudeville without Organs is lost in a labyrinth inside of a Chalk Outline inside of a dream.

Now they snore raggedly like chainsaws. This unseemly noise unfreezes the Real and the Virtual. They blink and separate.

*

The problem of the Real and the Virtual began with an embrace. Now, though, they have stepped away from one another while Vaudeville without Organs sleeps on, dreaming its apparently interminable dream.

Art(hur) has filled a quart jar with pulverized sidewalk chalk. If there was a thought balloon above Art(hur) it would contain a light bulb.

A well-lit thought balloon is truly a thing of beauty

*

Art(hur) feels it knows, conceptually, where things need to go but is unsure how to get there. There are logistical issues. How exactly does one go about suspending the Real and the Virtual?

Beneath the halo of light within the thought balloon, the gears of Art(hur)'s brain grind on.

*

A delivery truck pulls up to the Cave. A person clad in brown delivers a large heavy package addressed to Art(hur). The package is from:

ACME PULLEYS

*

Art(hur), with evident excitement, begins unpacking the box. The Real and the Virtual regard this event with great interest.

Meanwhile the Cave has, as if on cue, begun to fill up with the remaining members of the Cast of Characters. One by one, the Subject, an (Occasional) Other, Science, Politics, Love, History, and It have filed in and arranged themselves in a circle around Art(hur) and the now unpacked contents of the box. Of course since the Characters are so tightly encircling Art(hur), the Real and the Virtual are soon unable from their position on the dance platform to see what exactly Art(hur) is doing.

*

Within the circle of Characters, Art(hur) is lost in the contemplation of the items arrayed before him on the barroom floor. Art(hur) is as lost in his thoughts as is Vaudeville without Organs in its dreams.

Spread before Art(hur) are 2 heavy duty pulleys wound with lengths of strong rope, and 2 body harnesses.

*

The Real and the Virtual have drawn together again and are holding hands on the dance platform. They look at each other. They look at each other more intensely than can be said. After more than a few beats they nod to one the other and then walk hand in hand to the circle of Characters.

The circle parts to admit the couple and closes around them. The Real, the Virtual, and the one addressed familiarly as Art confer at length.

Thus a sequence of events is initiated.

*

The Cave: Days Later

Work crews have come and gone. Scaffoldings were erected and removed. Equipment has been installed. The stage is set. The actors and audience are in place.

The 2 pulleys have been affixed to the Cave's high ceiling above the dance platform. The Real and the Virtual are in body harnesses which are attached to their respective pulleys.

The Real and the Virtual are lying on their backs suspended in the air. Art controls the rope on the Virtual's pulley. It controls the rope on the Real's pulley.

The dance platform has been covered with sidewalk chalk dust: a blank canvas. Slowly, slowly Art and It begin to lower the Real and the Virtual in parallel toward the dance platform.

Art's plan is to keep the Real and the Virtual safe by pulling them away from the dance platform as soon as their outlines are made. Best laid plans and all that.

*

What is it about a course of events that defies description? A moment of experience always exceeds what can be said about it.

*

The plan, which Art and It have discussed for days, is to ever so briefly deposit the living templates onto the chalk dust covered dance platform and to pull them away the moment their impressions are made.

However, as fate would have it, their shadows reach the dance platform before the Virtual and the Real themselves do. Those shadows don't just lay there either—they undulate, pulse and writhe, agitating the chalk dust into contorted figures.

Art and It for a moment pause the descent of the Virtual and the Real.

*

Art and It have for a moment paused the descent of the Virtual and the Real. It's a fragile moment but seems to all involved to go on forever.

*

And then it begins to become apparent that the pulsing, writhing chalk dust figures are, now that the Real and Virtual have stopped moving, beginning to slow and relax into figures at rest. And their features are acquiring more definition.

The audience erupts in a buzz of utterances. Here's a sample:

The Subject: Are those the lines of Desire untangling on the dance floor?

An (occasional) Other: I believe I see the Author's trace in the dust. Or is that just what I want to see?

Science: We see neither the face of the Real nor the Virtual.

Politics: The Real and the Virtual are suspended above the dance floor with their backs to what is beneath them.

Love: Everything is in the hands of Art(hur) and It.

History: One wonders if there will be speech balloons as there were the times before.

*

It has escaped the notice of the audience, Art(hur), It, and of course the Real and the Virtual, that Vaudeville without Organs has been sleeping for days.

*

Until now It and Art have been entirely focused on the interplay they have set in motion and paused. They look at one another and nod.

The descent of the Real and the Virtual commences anew.

*

Vaudeville without Organs is stirring.

*

The chalk figures are moving, struggling to their feet.
They are raising their arms up. Their hands extend as
if to halt the descent of the Real and the Virtual.

And it seems to have worked. The descent pauses
once again.

*

So much ontological melodrama so little time.

*

Vaudeville without Organs is now swimming back to
consciousness and on the verge of speech.

*

Barely separated, the Virtual and the Real float in parallel, over the straining chalk figures. They turn to one another and kiss. Kisses of greater intensity follow. They begin to caress and grope one another. Their ropes twist and knot together in the course of making out.

*

Vaudeville without Organs is awake now and beginning to speak:

Hypnotist: Occupy...

Ventriloquist: Occupy...

Projectionist: Occupy...

Hypnotist: Occupy yourselves!

Ventriloquist: Occupy yourselves!

Projectionist: Occupy yourselves!

*

Art turns to It and moves in for a kiss. They embrace one another causing hands to leave the ropes of their respective pulleys. Consequently, the Virtual and the Real fall to the dance platform.

A cloud of chalk dust rises. The Virtual and the Real writhe groaning on the floor, still tied together and covered in chalk dust. They are no longer making out, but Art and It are.

The audience takes this all in and starts to drift away. Except for the Subject who is moving toward the dance platform.

*

The Subject is trying to separate the Virtual and Real, fumbling at their bonds. The Subject has eyes only for the task at hand, but its ears are open and taking in the sound of muffled sobbing.

*

Art is crying, inconsolably, crying out for It. Art embraced It and It vanished. It is gone. Art is bereft of It. Art is beside itself with anguish.

*

The Virtual and the Real seem oblivious to the Subject's efforts to free them. They're breathing heavily and have become more and more entangled.

*

Vaudeville without Organs is humming rather tunelessly. It sounds like static, white noise.

*

The Subject comes to realize that the knots which keep the Real and the Virtual together are (still) only tightening. The Subject decamps in search of a pair of scissors or a knife.

*

Art follows the Subject (out of the building and onto the street).

*

Bound together face-to-face, the Virtual and the Real are speaking to one another. Vaudeville without Organs listens intently. None of them can determine who is saying what, but this is what they hear:

“I’ve been mistaken for a leader.

I’ve been mistaken for a lover.

I’ve been mistaken for a loser.

I’ve been mistaken for a thing.”

The voices are absolutely indistinguishable.

Trying to make sense of the utterances exhausts
Vaudeville without Organs. They put their heads
down on the bar table and return to sleep.

*

The Virtual and the Real are singing “We are the
World” and giggling like maniacs.

*

Art and the Subject are distracted, are distracting one
another. What scissors? What knife? They wander
farther and farther away from the Cave.

Art and the Subject are trailed by their shadows; one
of whom wields a pair of scissors while the other
grips a knife.

*

The sound of Vaudeville without Organs' snoring has become strange. It sounds like clunking and whirring. It sounds like an industrial machine on its way to becoming an industrial accident.

And, as if on cue, the Virtual and Real attempt to struggle to their feet. And, half-risen, they fail—falling like the clumsy losers of a potato sack race. They seem hopelessly entangled.

*

Vaudeville without Organs are now repetitively saying in unison...

How is it that the two of them have come to appear as a third one?

How is it that the two of them have come to appear as a third one?

How is it that the two of them have come to appear as a third one?

How is it that the two of them have come to appear as a third one?

How is it that the two of them have come to appear as a third one?

How is it that the two of them have come to appear as a third one?

Etc. They drone on as the Real and the Virtual writhe on the floor in, by turns, either frenetic or desultory fashion.

*

The Cast of Characters: Status Report

The Ventriloquist: returned to snoring.

The Hypnotist: returned to snoring.

The Projectionist: returned to snoring.

Desire: missing.

The Subject: absent.

An (Occasional) Other: absent.

Science: absent.

Art(hur): absent.

Politics: absent.

Love: absent.

History: absent.

It: missing.

The Virtual: tied up.

The Real: tied up.

*

History, Love and Politics walk into the Cave, quickly take in the scene and then go off in search of Art(hur) and the Subject.

*

That the Author remains among the missing shouldn't go unremarked. That the Author, Art(hur) and an (occasional) Other have often been confused for one another is often remarked.

*

What of the Virtual, the Real, and Vaudeville without Organs?

What of the pair of shadows now entering the Cave? One wields a pair of scissors. One wields a knife.

Art and the Subject are now somewhere very far afield—adrift and separated from their shadows.

*

This is a first: Vaudeville without Organs is sleepwatching.

*

The Projectionist is watching the shadows move excruciatingly slowly through the Cave toward the entangled Virtual and Real.

While the Projectionist watches the shadows kneel beside the Virtual and the Real with knife and scissors, the Hypnotist watches the Projectionist.

While the Hypnotist watches the Projectionist, the Ventriloquist (whose lips are just barely moving) watches the Hypnotist.

*

All of the pictures on the walls of the Cave are out of alignment, crooked. None of the clocks are synchronized.

*

History, Love and Politics are still looking for
Art(hur) and the Subject.

They come at last upon a crowd of excited people.
The crowd is arrayed around something H, L and P
cannot see. The trio cuts through the knot of
humanity in search of what is there.

They find 2 Chalk Outlines struggling to stand. And
blank speech balloons trying to rise above the figures'
heads.

History, Love and Politics are convinced that these
Chalk Outlines are what remain of Art(hur) and the
Subject.

*

“Shadowslostindarkknifeglintsciscorssnipchalkdustsc
umblesZZZ...”

In the Cave voices braid into noise as Vaudeville
without Organs talks in its sleep.

*

The Virtual and the Real are a couple but no longer in
bondage. They've been making the rounds of the
Cave—walking in circles.

*

Politics, History and Love are as awake as Vaudeville
without Organs is asleep, but not always as articulate.

*

The two Chalk Outlines are, apparently, dancing.
And apparently talking to one another through their
plumped speech balloons. Their communications
which materialize and dematerialize quickly can only

be described as runic in appearance, and cannot be deciphered by any of those looking on.

Politics, History and Love are still part of the crowd surrounding the incomprehensible Outlines, but after a brief discussion they decide to return to the Cave.

*

The Real is walking around in the Cave in a clockwise pattern. The Virtual is walking around in the Cave in a counterclockwise pattern.

There are no shadows to be seen.

The chalk dust on the dance platform is a muddled mess. Viewed from a distance it looks like the fossil of a struggle.

*

Politics, History and Love have entered the Cave.
The Real continues its slow clockwise circuit, but the
Virtual bumps things up and is now flat- out running
its counterclockwise course around the interior of the
Cave.

Vaudeville without Organs is still sleeping, heads
down on the bar table. Snores alternate with
unintelligible words, phrases and sentences.

Politics, History and Love sit down at Vw/oOs' table.
Vw/oO begins to stir.

*

Meanwhile, back on the road, the 2 upright Chalk
Outlines are shaking up a storm of dust which causes
some of the onlookers to cough and sneeze.

Among the afflicted are an (occasional) Other and
Science. Both of whom look as if they've been made
up in white face; their respective persons are thickly
coated in chalk.

A consequence of the dust loss is that the Outlines are
slowly but surely disintegrating.

*

As Vaudeville without Organs swims back into consciousness, Politics, History and Love go under, go out like a light, falling asleep at the bar table.

Vw/oO is now fully awake and P, H and L are completely asleep. Vw/oO decides to leave the Cave.

*

P, L and H are talking in their sleep:

Politics: I'm OK for a corpse.

Love: I'm OK for a zombie.

History: I'm OK for a Ventriloquist's dummy.

*

The Virtual and the Real continue their circuit unabated. The Virtual is still running with all the energy that it has to expend. Every time the Virtual passes the dance platform, the chalk dust on its surface is unsettled, and rearranged by the passage of the blurring figure.

*

While the Cave can be accessed from the street, it should be noted that the Cave is beneath the street.

While the Cave is beneath the street, it should be remembered that it is—above all else—Vaudeville without Organs' base of operation.

While the Cave is Vaudeville without Organs' base of operation, it is wise to recall that Vw/oO has left the Cave, and that Politics, History and Love are collectively dreaming in its stead.

*

Vaudeville without Organs encounters Science, an (occasional) Other, and their chalky visages, on the road. They decide to repair to a park bench for a chat. The Hypnotist produces a flask from its vest pocket. They all enjoy its potent contents by turns and begin to speak to one another...

*

Meanwhile, back at the Cave, Politics, History and Love collectively enunciate a sentence just before they wake:

POLITICS: I...

HISTORY: ...am...

LOVE: elsewhere.

*

The Ventriloquist: Away from the Cave, I feel adrift. Politics, History and Love are slumbering in our place, perhaps dreaming our dreams in lieu of us.

The Hypnotist: I feel as if I'm lumbering in place like a sleepwalker.

The Projectionist: I have the sense that my very being is flickering somehow. That I am a kind of shifty place outside of who I consider myself to be.

Science: Objectively speaking, psychosis is the new normal. Or so a Slovenian philosopher wrote.

An (occasional) Other: I just miss Arthur and the Author. I feel myself to be most myself, most whole, when the three of us are together.

*

Twenty Recognitions

12. Story isn't writing.
13. Writing isn't misappropriation.

(To be continued.)

*

Science:

Of course

I'm afraid

of my shadows.

Aren't you

afraid of yours?

An (occasional) Other:

Sometimes I

am afraid

that you think

of me

as yours.

*

What happens to what disappears? Who's asking?

*

What is concealed in one's shadow? What is revealed?

*

The Virtual and the Real are still making their circuits. While the Virtual's pace is becoming more frenzied, the Real's is measured. When they meet, they stop and embrace. Then they continue on their opposing, yet regularly intersecting, paths.

Politics and History are snoring away, but Love is stirring.

*

Science: My old friend Theory used to say...

An (occasional) Other: that I only exist as a brief interruption in a temporary scheme...one of many.

*

Twenty Recognitions

14. Writing is *not* not misappropriated.
(To be continued.)

*

Love leaves the Cave. All else therein continues as before: the Virtual and the Real persist in their ongoing circuits and in their regular but brief embraces of one another.

Politics and History snooze on.

The chalk dust on the dance platform undulates in the wake of the Virtual and quivers after the passage of the Real. The chalk dust seems on the verge of becoming a wave.

*

Politics and History are dreaming of opposing armies.

Each soldier's face in Politics' army is a window.

Each soldier's face in History's army is a mirror.

History and Politics are snoring loudly, militantly.

*

Chalk outlines are associated with speech balloons
and disappearances.

Monsters are demonstration projects gone awry.

What happens happens both on and offstage.

Believing isn't not seeing. Or maybe that's exactly
what it is.

*

Love hasn't forgotten its failed attempt to trace its own outline. Who might limn *me*, it wonders obsessively, and what might be the consequences?

*

History and Politics are awake and on the move.

History's running with the Virtual.

Politics is walking with the Real.

Partners are switched at irregular intervals.

*

Twenty Recognitions

15. Thought might be danced, but it can't be choreographed.

(To be continued.)

*

Shadows are sitting on the chairs vacated by History and Politics.

The shadow with a knife has begun to chip away at a block of wood.

The shadow with a pair of scissors is making a length of paper dolls. Each doll has its own speech balloon.

*

What does a shadow see when it looks in a mirror?

What would a shadow say if it were to speak?

*

Twenty Recognitions

16. Answers don't surround one like a chalk outline.

(To be continued.)

*

Love is afoot in the world. It has no fixed destination.

Love has nothing but questions—where to go, what to do next?

*

The Cave's two shadows have put their artistic pursuits on hold. The block of wood sits in the middle of the table, as does a stack of folded paper dolls.

One shadow clasps a knife in its hand, the other shadow grips a pair of scissors.

The shadows are entirely focused on History's and Politics' pursuit of the Virtual and the Real.

*

What do shadows make of things?

*

Twenty Recognitions

17. Life consists of repetition and interruptions.

(To be continued.)

*

Vaudeville without Organs, Science and an (occasional) Other are still together on a bench. They are all talking, but they are not talking to one another. They are talking to themselves, but apparently are thinking they are talking to someone else.

*

“Are Chalk Outlines haloed by speech balloons still among us?” the Projectionist wonders out loud.

“What speaks through me?” the Ventriloquist asks.

“Can someone tell me what to do?” asks the Hypnotist.

Science keeps casting about saying: “This, not that, this, not that...”

An (occasional) Other : “Where has my shadow gone? What am I called and what am I called to do ?”

*

Love wants to become a Chalk Outline.

Love wants to limn a specific emptiness.

Love wants to become a framework for something yet to be made articulate.

*

The shadows aren't, and don't want to become,
attached to anyone.

*

History and Politics both are and aren't present to
their joint pursuit of the Virtual and the Real. That is
to say that it has become a job. A job followed
through on, but a job neither enjoyed nor understood.

•

The Missing

Desire, It and the Author: all missing. Art(hur) and
the Subject: also missing.

*

Vaudeville without Organs, an (occasional) Other, and Science are walking together now. They have decided to return to the Cave.

Love, though it does not yet know this, is on the same path but going the opposite way.

*

The Hypnotist is the only member of this little band to think that the figure in the distance moving toward them might be Love.

Love grows larger, draws near. Some seem to register its presence. Some don't.

Love passes by and out of sight. The little band continues on toward the Cave.

*

The Cave isn't just a destination. It's an aporia, an unresolvable canvas.

*

What speaks?

Who is what?

*

Love is feeling lost on the road away from the Cave.

*

The little band has reached its destination. The
Projectionist slowly opens the door to the Cave. Light
leaks in laddering shadows.

*

At the same moment that the Cave's door clicks closed, and the shadows return to what they'd been before the door was opened, Love admits to itself that it doesn't know where it is going or why. So it turns around and begins walking back toward the Cave.

*

Love's return path is strewn with obstacles. Contexts slide into new constellations.

*

Twenty Recognitions

18. Experience is opaque.

19. Presence and absence are interchangeable.

(To be continued.)

*

Love feels like it's tripping and then it falls down.

*

As the little band's eyes slowly adjust to the dim light of the Cave, they settle on the Virtual and the Real and take in the scene.

Things are not as they were before.

The Virtual and the Real are slow dancing on the chalky dance platform as the juke box blasts "Multivariate Melodies."

History and Politics are in their cups at a table arguing with two shadows.

There is chalk dust in the air.

*

There is road grit in Love's blinking eyes. Its knees are bruised. It trudges on toward the Cave; and, lost in thought, stumbles and falls again.

*

Love's Obsessive Interior Monologue

If in then out.

If out then in.

If in then out.

If out then in.

If in then out.

If out then in.

If in then out.

If out then in.

(And so on...and on...and on...)

*

The little band has disbanded.

An (occasional) Other and Science are now seated at the table with History, Politics and the two shadows.

Vaudeville without Organs has just started shaking its collective booty on the dance platform with the Virtual and the Real.

The jukebox is in the middle of "Joint Custody Epistemology."

*

Love doesn't know what to think, so it suspends thought and simply continues moving one step at a time toward the Cave.

*

To those stomping the chalky boards of the dance platform, the Cave seems like a petri dish of compounding and decomposing sounds. Every now and then a snatch of contextless conversation arrives unbidden in a dancer's ear. For example:

"You untune me."

Or:

"Bodies interrupt me."

*

The shadows are singing scales: "Me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me... Me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me... Me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me... Me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me..."

*

Twenty Recognitions

20. Everything's not at *all* about any one thing.

*

The shadows have fallen silent, but History, Politics, Science and an (occasional) Other are now all singing scales.

History: Then-then, then-then-then-then-then...

Politics: Them-them, them-them-them-them-them...

Science: This-there, there-this-there-this-there...

An (occasional) Other: You-us, us-you-you-you-us...

*

Love keeps trudging on toward the Cave. One step at a time.

Love comes to realize that its feet are consistently falling into someone else's footprints. Footprints pointed toward the Cave.

*

The dancers on the dance platform are stepping in one another's footprints too, but they haven't noticed. They are wrapped up in the rhythms of "Chalk Songlines."

*

Love feels as if it is walking in place, stuck in space, mired in infinite regress, always already historical.

Love wonders: if it is no longer truly moving toward the Cave, is the Cave moving toward it?

Every step Love takes now feels like a disarticulating proposition.

*

Rhythms enact rhetorics of structure in the chalk dust on the dance platform. Dancing becomes mobile architecture.

*

The shadows have stopped singing scales and have become transfixed by chalk dust permutations.

Meanwhile the shadows' table mates are swaying in their chairs, dancing in place, and still singing scales.

*

The Virtual and the Real are slowly grinding against one another to the tune of "Ghost Whirl."

Vaudeville without Organs is growing tired, winding down, no longer shaking with conviction.

*

Love has reached, and is now hesitating in front of, the threshold of the Cave.

*

Vaudeville without Organs has left the dance platform.

The Projectionist is rummaging in a closet.

The Ventriloquist is wandering about the Cave, mumbling to itself.

The Hypnotist has fallen asleep at a table next to the table shared by the shadows, History, Politics, Science, and an (occasional) Other.

*

Love enters the Cave. It sees the Projectionist situating an A/V cart in front of a large screen. It hears the strains of "Irregular Interventions." It drinks from a flask it doesn't remember having taken from its pocket. There is a smell of both exertion and nervous sweat. Love feels nervous itself, and slightly dizzy, touches a table top to steady itself and then sits down across from the sleeping Hypnotist.

*

The Projectionist readies a laptop computer and begins to project in a rapid fire fashion numerous images onto the screen. The images are coming so

fast and furiously that they can only be perceived in a fragmentary way.

The still mumbling Ventriloquist is walking in circles around the Projectionist. Passing in front of the screen, the Ventriloquist itself briefly becomes a screen, further fragmenting and even bending the quickly changing images.

*

One by one the Virtual, the Real, History, Politics, Science, Love and an (occasional) Other join the Ventriloquist in the formation of a conga line which rhythmically snakes around the Projectionist and across the flickering screen.

The shadows observe these goings-on at a distance.

The Hypnotist continues to sleep at its table and to mumble-snore in perfect harmony with the Ventriloquist.

*

The shadows are speaking to one another. They converse, like the Chalk Outlines of old, through speech balloons. The speech balloons are solid black. On the other hand, the utterances which play across the surfaces of the balloons are various shades of gray, and as a consequence, often impossible to make out.

*

After being expressed, the shadows' speech balloons float away, dissolve in the atmosphere, and rain dark pixels on what dwells below.

*

The conga line kicks up occasional puffs of chalk dust which come to share air space with the fallout from the shadows' speech.

*

The shadows' speech depletes them. With each utterance they grow more faint. Finally, reduced to the barest of outlines, the shadows themselves pixelate and rain to the floor of the Cave.

Who can doubt the materiality of speech? It is the stuff of shadows and chalk outlines, is it not?

*

What speaks?

Not the Hypnotist. Unless snores count.

*

The conga line is unraveling. The Projectionist is returning A/V equipment to the closet.

The Hypnotist continues to snore.

*

The Ventriloquist, visibly agitated, is talking to itself.

*

The Virtual meets the eye of the Real in the mirror
above the bar.

*

History looks coyly over its shoulder at Politics.

*

Science is mumbling to itself over a glass of something: "Repetition is the basis of art and experimentation, but while pundits say it is insane to expect different results from the same procedures done over and over, time and again, sometimes stubborn persistence in the same produces the New. It is a paradox which is hard to get one's head around."

*

What does Love see when it looks in the mirror above the bar? Only an (occasional) Other.

*

An (occasional) Other gravitates to the dance platform, stomps its feet, considers the puffs of chalk dust which result.

*

The juke box is on again. A wicked version of
“Waking Windows” rocks the room.

*

Vaudeville without Organs sputters into thought...

The Projectionist: Our incoherence...

The Hypnotist: drunken algorithms...

The Ventriloquist: wanton recognitions...

*

History: The past will swallow your present.

Politics: Let’s call everything by different names.

*

The Virtual and the Real are transfixed at the sight of an (occasional) Other still stomping in the chalk dust. Ghostly plumes rise and disintegrate, over and over again.

*

The Virtual: Those chalk plumes resemble nascent speech balloons or maybe thought bubbles.

The Real: Yes, but...*fuck* stencils, *fuck* templates. Talk to me.

The Virtual: Sometimes I think that all of my friends are imaginary.

The Real: I think so too—that all of *your* friends are imaginary.

The Virtual: Haunted, but not possessed, a name is the question it answers.

*

The Virtual: Lost arguments structure me.

The Real: Lost travelers think around me.

*

Love feels like a one-way mirror: "People look right through me. At who knows what."

*

The Real climbs up on a bar table and takes off all of its clothes. Its body is revealed to be a map of crisscrossing sutures. There is nothing seamless about the body of the Real.

*

Love extends a hand to the Real, helps it to get down from the table.

Love: I want to trace you.

The Real: Don't deny your desires.

*

Vaudeville without Organs observes the exchange between Love and the Real and becomes animated.

*

The Real is on its back, naked, on the floor of the Cave. Love rummages in a pocket for sidewalk chalk.

Vaudeville without Organs chatters. The voice of the Projectionist stands out from that noise—“Look at the body of the Real. It appears to be composed of knots!”

*

Chalk located, Love traces an outline of the body of the Real, and an outline of that outline, and so on... Each outline gets bigger and more distorted than the last. Soon the Real is enclosed in a rippling web of chalked lines.

As the outlines of the Real enlarge, the Real begins to writhe.

*

The writhing of the Real becomes violent, convulsive. The thrashing accelerates, whipping the surrounding outlines into twisting ropes of concentrated powder.

*

The Ventriloquist: I feel called upon to say that the Real's struggles only strengthen the restraints Love made.

The Projectionist: The Real's struggles aren't *against*. The Real is not opposed to Love's outlines. It is trying to achieve a better fit.

The Hypnotist: And I want to suggest that Love traces the Real because of Love's own yearning to be traced.

*

In this sentence Love is sobbing.

*

The Real stops thrashing, goes still. For a moment...everything... everyone in the Cave feels flat—2-dimensional. Except, that is, for the chalk outlines that have become chalk ropes. They seem vibrant, pulsing, charged with life.

The Cave has become very quiet. Eerily so.

*

In this sentence Love kneels beside the Real.

In this sentence Love begins to unwrap chalk ropes from the Real's body.

*

In this sentence there is now a writhing pile of chalk ropes on the floor of the Cave.

In this sentence the naked Real slowly rises to its feet.

*

In this sentence the Virtual hands the Real its clothes.

*

In this sentence the line between the Virtual and the Real is incontinent.

*

(In this sentence (in the Cave(experience is
parenthetical(and the parentheses leak(...

*

In this sentence a line begins to form into a knot—a
clot—of personages in the Cave.

*

In this sentence the Virtual, the Real, History, Politics,
Science, Love, an (occasional) Other, the entity
Vaudeville without Organs and its constituent parts
(the Ventriloquist, the Projectionist, the Hypnotist) are
all present within the Cave.

*

In this sentence
the Virtual and the Real
are dancing in the mirror
above the Cave's bar.

*

The Cave's bar's mirror frames the discarded pile of chalk ropes (which writhes behind the Virtual, the Real, and just ahead of Love).

*

Love mumbles: "Enclosures, disclosures, all these missed mixages. I mean *messages*."

*

The writhing chalk ropes are becoming knots. This is reflected in the mirror above the Cave's bar.

*

Love stares into the Cave's bar's mirror but doesn't see itself there.

*

Love feels beside itself, quite literally parallel to itself,
but absent to itself also.

*

The chalk ropes are now so firmly knotted that they
writhe no more.

*

Tangled chalk ropes, sentences, mirrors are the least
of Vaudeville without Organs' present concerns.

At the moment, Vaudeville without Organs is all
about the shadows.

Those absent shadows.

*

“The shadow of a voice.”

“The shadow of a thought.”

“The body of a shadow.”

*

Love stands between the

Virtual and the Real.

The Real holds one

of Love’s hands

while the Virtual

holds the other.

*

Love stands between the Virtual and the Real and
stands before the chalk knots.

*

The Virtual's unbidden question:
if Love were to lay down upon
the pile of chalk knots,
would a map
of the Real's sutures appear?

*

Vaudeville without Organs' current project is to
write graffiti on the Cave's walls:

"I am a signal!"

"I am the mirror's consent."

"I am a function of you."

*

An (occasional) Other is contemplating one of
Vaudeville without Organs' wall texts. Shouldn't it
be *content*?

"It says *consent*," says Science.

*

More graffiti:

"THERE IS NOONE."

"WHERE AM I?"

"WHO ARE YOU?"

*

An (occasional) Other is wondering how to complete the latest graffito:

“Am I your _____”

Am I your answer?

Am I your beyond?

Am I your conduit?

Am I your destiny?

Am I your eventuality?

Am I your finitude?

Am I your ghost?

Am I your harangue?

Am I your investment?

Am I your *jouissance*?

Am I your kismet?

Am I your language?

Am I your monstrence?

Am I your negation?

Am I your opening, your Other?

Am I your partition?

Am I your question?

Am I your reason?

Am I your sex—or maybe your shadow?

Am I your traits?

Am I your usual?

Am I your vanishing point?

Am I your weather?

Am I your x-ray?

Am I yours?

Am I your zeitgeist?

*

More graffiti:

**“Am I
Transparent?”**

to you?"

**"Why are
you
so opaque?"**

**"Am I
remote-controlled?"**

*

History, Politics, the Virtual and the Real all have a purchase on Love.

Science and an (occasional) Other observe from a distance. Neither can tell if History, Politics, the Virtual and the Real are working in concert or against one another.

Are they attempting to restrain Love? Are they fighting over Love? Are they trying to force Love into a particular course of action?

Their intentions are unknown.

*

Science and an (occasional) Other are not comfortable with one another.

*

Vaudeville without Organs' graffiti writing continues apace:

"Some eyes are mirrors.

Some eyes are holes."

*

The Projectionist wonders if Love has agency.

The Ventriloquist licks its lips.

The Hypnotist stares fixedly into the mirror above the bar.

*

An (occasional) Other feels like a speech balloon, like a cut-out made from destruction paper.

*

The Ventriloquist can't stand the sound of its own voice.

*

Love isn't completely indifferent to History, Politics, the Virtual and the Real. But close enough. Still, they are all a little too close to one another at the moment. Close also to the chalk knots.

*

Every timber, every structural component of the Cave is creaking.

*

Vaudeville without Organs has stopped composing graffiti and is now entirely focused on an (occasional) Other.

*

Science leaves the Cave with an ambiguous expression on its face. Is that a smirk or a grimace?

*

An (occasional) Other feels that being stared at by Vaudeville without Organs is like talking to oneself in a language that one doesn't know.

*

An (occasional) Other: Che vuoi?

*

Love has come to accept that it can't move apart from History, Politics, the Virtual and the Real. In their midst, Love feels like a placeholder between *in* and *out*.

*

Vaudeville without Organs casts its net: the Projectionist, Hypnotist and Ventriloquist surround

an (occasional) Other. They stand but a few feet from Love and its enframing four. On the Cave's floor, between the two groups, the chalk knots begin to writhe and unravel.

*

Science is gone but not missed.

*

Love and an (occasional) Other are looking directly at one another with something like recognition.

*

The chalk knots are now completely unraveled, granulated and transformed into an unblemished expanse of white dust spread out between the two knots of figures.

*

Questions from the First “Knot” of Figures

History: Is what is ahead of us behind us?

Politics: Is what is ahead of us where we want to be?

The Virtual: Is what is in front of us what is there?

The Real: I’m here. Where are you?

Love: Am I elsewhere?

*

Questions from the Second “Knot” of Figures

The Projectionist: What can you show me?

The Hypnotist: What can you make me do?

The Ventriloquist: What can you make me say?

An (occasional) Other: What can you be for me?

*

The expanse of chalk dust between the two constellations or knots of figures seems to constitute a dividing line which may or may not be crossed.

It is also something in itself that *cannot* be known.

*

Ventriloquist: What do voices come from?

Projectionist: How do shadows breed?

Hypnotist: What makes one do what one does?

*

The Virtual: This outline of...

The Real: us all...

History: is anything...

Politics: minus what?

*

Love chuckles.

The Real: What's so funny?

Love: I just realized...

The Virtual: Realized what?

Love: That the two of you must be siblings.

The Virtual: We are, but...

The Real: we were separated at birth.

*

Politics: The chalk dust appears to have settled.

Should something be done *to* or with *it*?

History: Something already has been done.

Politics: I mean something *more*.

*

History: You always mean more than you say.

*

The Ventriloquist: Talking to myself, I speak through whoever, whomever, whatever.

*

An (occasional) Other: Talking to myself, I speak to *you*.

*

The circle around Love is broken. History and Politics have come to blows, their windmilling fists failing to connect as often as not.

*

The Virtual has Love by the wrists. The Real grips the ankles. Love swings between the two like a hammock.

*

Love feels like a swaying bridge.

*

History and Politics, exhausted, have ceased to fight. Sweaty, bloody, disheveled and sore, they sleep in one another's arms on the Cave's floor.

*

An (occasional) Other takes in the sight of the sodden, stinking mass History and Politics has become and recognizes it as one thing: a veritable compost heap.

*

The Virtual and the Real only have eyes for one another. Love slips from their hands.

*

Love falls (in the Cave) in this sentence.

*

Love is still falling.

*

Love continues to fall the short distance from the Virtual and the Real to the Cave's floor. This seems to go on forever.

*

The Hypnotist [observing an (occasional) Other staring at the mirror above the Cave's bar]: You will only see your back.

*

Love is on the floor of the Cave. Its fall, though exceedingly slow, was hard. Its eyes open to a fuzzy view, not much more than an arm's length away, of the expanse of chalk dust. Something blotchy seems to be materializing on its surface. Something, Love thinks to itself, that is akin to a stain on a mirror.

*

An (occasional) Other:

I want to make love in a larger font.

I want some sort of shadow up in me to leak out.

*

Ventriloquist (mumbling): Perception isn't reception. Reflection isn't either.

*

The Projectionist's gaze is fixed upon the chalk dust which registers as nothing but a screen.

*

An (occasional) Other is being overtaken by a terrifying sensation of vertiginous claustrophobia. It feels as if it is either emerging from or being buried in something as white as snow.

*

Love hums along with “Unheimlich Maneuvers” until the jukebox goes silent and a voice rings out: “Last call!”

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Appearances: A Novel In Fragments is a genre bending philosophical jam session peopled by the performance art power trio Vaudeville without Organs, Desire, the Subject, an (occasional) Other, Science, Art, Politics, Love, History, It, the Author, the Virtual and the Real, not to mention Chalk Outlines and two shadows (both of whom are AWOL from their respective bodies and wielding sharp instruments). Much of the book's action takes place in a subterranean dive bar called The Cave. Plato might not be rolling in his grave, but he's probably thinking "WTF?"

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