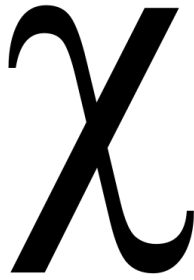


Fiona Hanley



The Gesture of Essaying

“They do not apprehend how being at variance it agrees with itself: there is a back-stretched connexion, as in the bow and the lyre” - Heraklitos. ¹

Metaphor, as Jan Zwicky has argued, is the basic form our understanding of the world takes, writing how, “To mean is always in some measure, to carry across: meta pherin” (2003: 51), following the logic of what she calls “seeing-as”: “I am interested in the phenomenon of ‘seeing-as’ because it encapsulates the mystery of meaning. The moment of recognition happens as if by magic; and yet, when we reflect on it, we see – its very name tells us this – that it is impossible without prior experience. What becomes puzzling then is the phenomenon of insight, the creation (apparently) of new meaning. Here, we forget that to recognise can mean to re-think, as in think through differently. It need not always signify mere repetition of a former cognition”, (2003: 1).

*Zwicky’s sense of understanding entails the passing of something already experienced being perceived in relation to something else and in this carrying across there occurs: “an act of contextualisation, a sensing of connexions between aspects of immediate experience and other experiences” (2003: 1). Metaphor, for Zwicky, speaks to the spatiality of understanding that is inflected with time. Simply by placing things beside each other, a burgeoning realisation can dawn. Such is the form Zwicky’s own philosophical text *Metaphor and Wisdom* takes, where a quotation occupying the right-hand page is accompanied on the left hand page by a short but dense philosophical thought of her own. Rather than the reader’s understanding being drawn by explicit connections, the possible relations are held in movement, back and forth – where meaning is not determined, fixed, set in place, but lies in this crossing between the gutter, and indeed, between other components of the book. It is a gesture of understanding Zwicky calls “resonant”, one which retunes our sense of clarity from the “light” of enlightenment thinking, to the root of “clear” as “kal” – “to shout, resound” (Zwicky 2014: 16). Thought not as “truth”, or “method”, but “attunement”: “Lyric resonance is a function of attunement. It requires an open structure with distinguishable aspects or distinguishable axes of experience that stand in a nonlinear relation to one another. Being drawn apart,*

¹ I would like to express my humble thanks to Nancy Ann Roth for her generosity of scholarly spirit, which opened up the world of Flusser’s gestures for me. I would also like to thank Anke Finger and her power team of students for hosting “Remediating Flusser”, and most especially for creating a truly open, dialogical atmosphere on Flusser’s work – conversations which I am still absorbing.

it is brought together with itself” (Zwicky 2014: 17). The “is”, whether directly said or not, of a metaphor is its “lyric aspect” (Zwicky 2014: 21) – that is, the “is” of a metaphor always also points to an “is not” – she calls a “live relation” of a simultaneous connecting and dividing – the work of carrying across: “Metaphor has, as we might say, flex. We see, simultaneously, similarities and dissimilarities. In metaphor we experience a gestalt shift from one distinct intellectual and emotional complex to another ‘in an instant of time’”, (Zwicky 2003: 4). Metaphor is a paradoxical understanding in which a third element of meaning is established but is not solidified, it remains in a tension of, as Zwicky puts it, “Loss-in-connexion, connexion-in-loss” (2003: 56). Metaphor speaks to the inability of language to link completely, to carry across between experiences, ourselves, the world at large – its incompatibility: “The experience of the inadequacy of language to comprehend the world is the experience of the duende of language. And it is this that metaphor carries. But that duende is not a failure on the part of language any more than dying is a failure. We can think of it as failure only if we imagine that language is somehow ‘outside’ us – a phenomenon independent of human life. ‘Not one, not two’ – that’s how it is with us” (Zwicky 2003: 34). Resonant understanding relies on the connection of distinct components of a whole – their distinction a necessary space between, a requisite openness which enables a carrying-across, a re-sounding, an attunement.

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“The sea was its own language”, she said – “not for me, but for others who sail there – they read it”, she said. And as she said it she realised she did not know what she was talking about – it was a mouthful gorged without chewing, in her insatiate swallowing of volumes and tomes – something now stuck in her gut, something not yet absorbed.

Shame might have sat itself upon her, but instead of its press, all she could feel was the space of the conversation, the openness of the relation ballooning there, allowing her to hear herself speak something she didn’t understand and to let this realisation resonate.

It was as if *she* were the one for whom these words were meant, that in giving these words, she received them again – as if that was why she was here, in this room, having this conversation, engaged in this exchange; an ebbing taking her back to the sea of her own sailing; a reflux tasting. And she began to sense a dawning realisation of what she had been trying to think with Flusser’s work – dialogical exchange as perhaps something more complex, entwined, intricate – as she was experiencing in her own “I” articulation – one fugued by a deep sensation of otherness, of being a stranger to herself, of not knowing what she was saying at all *and a familiarity* of something she

already knew. In the flow of conversation she could feel the swirl of a strange-familiar, own-other, known-unknown – an uncanny swivelling movement between.

Not something to place a finger on precisely, but something to do with...The sea as a language for those who can read it....something about how they could read the waves and navigate there. A living knowledge. Yet there was that quotation from Pessoa, “Sailing is necessary, living is not necessary”.

And that other from Flusser, oddly echoing it – “Writing is necessary, living is not”.

Strange, quasi-same repetition. Something there she does not yet understand.

Marie hands her a cup of tea and she sets it down on the table, waits for it to cool, as the room fills with a pregnant pause – resting in the open space between them.

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There was a flux and fluency to their conversations and each time they were resumed, alone, in the space of the room, she could feel something being worked upon her – as if they created between them a spinning sphere of understanding, in which they revolved what they already knew – and in this re-turn disturbed it, turned it around. There was no way of fore-telling the toss or turn of the conversations – each had its own fluctuation, an unpredictable patterning – surging, ebbing. She was forced in these encounters to think again, to re-cognise. A gesture of conversing which was simultaneously making and unmaking her, again and again.

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Their conversations seemed to shift her understanding through contingencies – one arc of talk upon another forcing a re-cognition of what she thought she already knew, already understood. A re-visiting which involved *duende* – a struggling between connection and loss; letting go in order to comprehend; the irrevocable distance in the closeness of the relation building there; the strangeness and familiarity between her self now and another self, separated by time.

Something she could perceive in the conversing waves of her own writing, the effort to try to articulate something already known, but not yet explicit, in need of re-cognition to understand –

seeing again through a *live relation* – the struggle to mediate between the incongruency of a fluxing, moving situation – the tension of a working chiasmus of loss-in-connexion, connexion-in-loss. A text which becomes almost not hers at all – something else entering the line in the between time of beginning a sentence and ending it, beginning a paragraph and ending it, beginning the text and finally ending it; some interference, *duende*, which disturbs in the passage through, the movement across the page. Always a question then of navigation – *how to cross* – what is the passage through?

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“How can we cross the heath? How can we cross the sea? What does it mean to cross the sea? Images. The space of transformation as such emerges from this hodge-podge of abundance whose merit lies in having taken diagonally, askew, crosswise, many of the usual and stupid distinctions of philosophy. Translation is both a praxis and a theory; turbulence is a stable and unstable phenomenon where liquid moves and stays in a randomly fixed form; the organism – my body – is now an exchanger of time. At this point in time, several chronies intertwine. Perhaps I have encountered only spaces of transformation, singular spots or slack varities. The simplest of these, absolutely, bursts the clinamen: be it an order brought to fall, in which, suddenly, bursts the clinamen: be it an order brought to its elementary state; be it a minimal operator, a difference of angle, the smallest change of direction. Then a second order appears, a volume in the fall brought about by a small volute attached to the bursting spark of chance. The space of transformation here is brought back to the first and simplest states, almost to the zero state, both in the theoretical and in the concrete. From that, however, a global system is formed, a world in the universe of worlds” (Serres 2007: 72).

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“Work flows from me like honey, like the spider’s web. I don’t know with what external order I nourished this second order; my body is transformer of itself, but also a transformer for this linguistic wax, a long secretion come from my five fingers” (Serres 2007: 87).

An English draft of an essay, simply entitled “Skin”, sees Flusser proffering our being-in-the-world as a topological formation, a “skin surface”, upon which “I happen to the world and the world happens to me” (2006: 1). His essay draws up an alternative “atlas” of the skin – one which seeks to re-model our relationship to the world from *within*, rather than the objective perspective as if from without – the view from which our maps of the world have traditionally been drawn. We must, Flusser argues, become “superficial” – that is, dwell on the *surface*, as the depth at which the world happens. [(The boundary being, as Heidegger reminded us, the place at which something *begins*)]. Flusser inverts a “theoretical” understanding of the skin as the limit between self and world, proffering instead, from an experiential understanding, the “I” and “world” as limits, horizons, of the skin, which mutually transform it and make up the depth of our being-in-the-world.

This surface of the skin “protrudes into the third dimension of space, and does so dynamically along the dimension of time” (Flusser 2006:2). The “curves” of this space are its geography and its dynamics its “historical” accidents, some of which, like the mouth, are more or less permanent than other “shallow valleys” (Flusser 2006:2), like a wound. The outlines of such a skin thus change in its relation to the environment through its permeability of “absorbing” and “secreting” - functions which spatio-temporally inflect one’s being-in-the-world. In absorption, the skin incorporates what Flusser calls a “skin possibility” – something which comes towards the skin from the future – an “adventure” – and one which becomes real as an event only upon encountering the surface of the skin, becoming a “fact”, or “scar”, and comprising one’s “given world” – one’s “passive presence” – stored in the skin as part of one’s passive past, or “memory”. The totality of such adventurous skin possibilities form the outer “horizon of absorbable influences”. In secretion, on the other hand, the skin emits a “skin possibility” – a future which also comes towards the skin, but in this case, from the *inner* horizon, what he calls “my freedom”. Such a secretion is a “decision” which becomes real as a happening on the surface of the skin and becomes part of “how I give myself to the world”, or “my active presence in the

world”, which leaves a scar on the skin as an “action remembered” – what forms the entirety of “my work”.²

The skin sketched by Flusser thus, lies between horizons of future and past, freedom and given world – horizons which overlap but are still distinguished through inner and outer limits. The inner limit of secretion, the “I”, lies as the “most extreme and nebulous limit of freedom”, while the outer limit of absorption is not that of the world as such, but, one’s death. These limits exert pressures on the skin from either side but they are never “real” as such – they “never and nowhere happen as a fact” (Flusser 2006: 3) – never encounter the skin surface. The limit “I” is “more like a bottomless abyss below the skin surface”, and “my death”, “is more like a sharp line behind every adventure” (Flusser 2006: 3).

In this way, our being-in-our-skin is imagined by Flusser not as a self set against the world, the locus of an “I”, but is a fluctuating medium, a *live relation* – an ever changing surface, passed through in revertible directions – between effluences and influences, between decisions and adventures, between an active presence in the world and a passive presence in the world; an inflection between a given world – a future that happens to me - and what I attempt to give to the world, the future I attempt to make happen. The skin, in this way, is a complex milieu of events and exchange – a Xenos encounter flexing between host and guest – the strange openness of our being-in-the-world – a porosity constantly transforming the past material of the skin through encounter.

Flusser’s skin, as our being-in-the-world is, in this way, a malleable, fluctuating form – tossed by the tide of death, of entropy, of historicity, surged against by the swirling abyss of an I, of freedom, of making, of birth – a pulsating rhythm.

The sense of time of being-in-the-world Flusser models here, is not, as he puts it in another essay, simply entitled “Experience”, a movement as if progressing forward,(corresponding to a particular ideology of time as linear), but, as an “adventure”, the future comes towards us, what

² It should be emphasised that Flusser, throughout this essay, continually points to the limitations of what he is proffering. The essay, in this way, is very much a trial. “Now it is very doubtful that many will agree to this way of inscribing the fact, but some will agree that it is open to further improvement” (Flusser 2006: 7).

the German “Zukunft” speaks to: “We are always in the here and now, and the future advances towards us in our here and now from all directions” (Flusser, 2003: 66). The future is what happens to us, what comes towards us, what Flusser calls our “passion”, our “suffering” – the encounters we don’t anticipate, don’t design. But we also, as Flusser puts it, seek out a future, attempt experiences, that is we “experiment” – we decide to search and seek out encounters, design experiences, that will help us to change the given world – the skin we’re already in, what we’ve already absorbed. Every “decision” of the skin surface is thus, an attempted freedom, an *experiment* in searching, something captured in the German “Versuch” – that is, it is a living as *essaying*.

“I was vomited upon Brazil at a plastic and assimilable age, and I spent the last thirty years of my life in search of myself in Brazil and in search of Brazil within myself. If to live is to search one’s way, I lived intensely, that is, philosophically. But if to live is to have found one’s way, I did not even begin to live, that is, to have committed myself. I spent my life in availability, and I am still available” (Flusser 2002: 198).

“To live is to accept oneself in order to change oneself. He who does not assume himself does not live his own life, but the life of people. He who assumes himself and accepts himself without at least trying to change does not live actively but just functions in the function of what determines him. Because the attempt to change myself implies the attempt to change the surroundings in which I find myself. In short, to live is to discover who I am and to try to start from there in order to ‘be better’ (or ‘more’), thus changing not merely oneself but also the world. In fact, this task which is life is a task that renews itself at every instant. The question ‘Who am I?’ is new whenever I ask it, and the decision to start from its answer is painful and radical whenever taken. Thus I shall ask the question ‘Who am I?’ as if it were for the first time, in order to make (who knows?) a decision” (Flusser 2002: 198).

To search, to essay, is to be willing and wanting to change one’s skin – as Heidegger would put it, it is a responding to the call of care – to the singularity of one’s existence – a taking up of responsibility for one’s being-in-the-world, the skin one is in. The attempt is to assay an existence

that is one's own, an engagement of self in a praxis of self-transformation – a commitment to respond to the question “Who am I?” – a question which, as Flusser says, must always be repeated, must always be posed again. Such an essaying places the world one has absorbed into question – an unsettling of the skin. To do so is to attempt to decide oneself, to choose oneself, it is a question of *freedom*, what Flusser calls a “gesture of the skin surface”. Gesture is Flusser's way of understanding thinking as an attempt at freedom – one which is always caught in the tension of the skin – of an existence both fully determined and fully free in the world – a reverting permeability of absorbing and secreting; the tension of attempting to decide oneself, whilst constantly being decided, being *thrown* by the world.

The essaying of a gesture of thinking is a search, a questing which comes out of one's living being-in-the-world and so it is subject to a particular situation, as Flusser articulates in “The Gesture of Searching”, an: “environment, in which and with which we engage, and that engages with us” (Flusser 2014: 155). Every gesture of thinking is a searching, an essaying, coming from a “concrete, full, living experience of being-in-the-world...It is..an ‘aesthetic’ starting point, if we translate *aistheton*, with ‘experience’ and *aisthethai* with ‘to live through’....But lived experience is not only aesthetic in the narrow sense of the term. It is also pleasure and suffering, and it creates values. The researcher who starts from such experience is trying to reach a value: freedom. He is trying to go beyond his limits..The researcher ceases to be a ‘pure’ subject to become a living person, that is, someone who lives epistemologically, ethically and aesthetically all at once” (Flusser 2014: 156). The movement of searching is guided not by rules, or method, but by one's interest, that is, the claims the world has already made on your skin, how you have been addressed. An address which is in flux – changing in relation to a changing environment – a constant attempted orientation, a passage through, in a dynamic ever evolving situation.

The two distinct epithelial movements of *extending* through secreting and contracting through absorbing, proffer two distinct modalities of being in the world, ones that move between the limits of “I” and “death”, playing themselves out on the surface of the skin – giving to our exist-

ence its particular *tone* – the tension and flexion of a skin as it is stretched between birth and death – the passage of our being-in-the-world.

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In the course of another conversation, she is cast back to her swim in the Atlantic, mid-May ...turning, she sees a surging wave coming towards her, and in a moment's awareness, she knows that there is no time to escape it and that it will knock her under. It is all she can do to resign herself to its force as she – crashing – the wave throws her from her feet and she is all ocean now, all passing through her ocean, rushing and swirling, the water revolving her body – pushing her forth in spirals...and dragging her back, as the wave recedes from the shore, trying to haul her with it – she pushes back – forcing – and finally heaves her body up, pulling its heavy load – breaking through the surface.

It is all she can do to break into convulsive, choking laughter, as she coughs her breath back – waves of laughter at the sea's sheer indifference – waves cracking open her body.

Wrapping her skin in a towel she sits on the beach under the dropping rain and feels the shift the encounter has washed her with. Letting her body sink into the sand, she feels an understanding of what she has been struggling to understand – here, now, in the abruptness of the sea's turning she could grasp it in an instance. And she at last agreed that philosophy occurs in living – in the flux of contingent happenings forcing meta pberin.

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The essaying, the searching for an orientation, an attempted commitment, is that which, for Flusser, underlies all gestures. For the quest of his own existence, it was the gesture of writing which became for him the gesture through which he assayed an existence, through which he attempted an orientation in the world. It was the field of language thus, which became for him his field of search, as he explains: “First, and obviously, I love language. I love its beauty, its richness, its mystery, and its charm. I am truly myself only when I speak or write or read or when it murmurs within myself to be articulated. But also because it is symbolic form, the dwelling of being that veils and reveals, the channel that links me to others, the field of immortality *aere perennius*, the matter and instrument of art. It is my repertoire and my structure, the game I play, the model of all my models. It is open and opens up the unutterable. It is my commitment, in it I become real, and through it I float toward its horizon and its foundation, which is the silence of the unspeakable. It is the form of my religiosity. And possibly the form of my perdition” (Flusser 2002: 201). These words speak to a relationship to language exceeding simple communication, where

more of an existential attunement, a passionate engagement, is at stake, through which he can attempt not so much “knowledge” as such, but an *existence*, an attempted freedom – one linked to others, to history, to death, to art, to the unknown.

This pell-mell proffers a possibility of being-in-the-world and yet never simply, or easily as such, but through struggle and resistance. Indeed it is with the *resistance* of words, with a tension and counter-force, that, as Flusser argues, the gesture of writing begins. Such forces “have to do with rhythmic and formal rules that weigh against the virtuality to be expressed and assert their own forms. But only after having penetrated these layers, only when the virtuality has met the resistance of the words, does one decide to write. Until then, the virtuality to be expressed might press out in another gesture, such as that of musical composition or painting. When we are talking about writing, we must start by describing the resistance of words” (Flusser 2014: 22). The search of writing begins when language asserts itself against his efforts, obstructs his passage through. Language declares itself against his project through the life force of a historicity – that in which he is involved and yet what exceeds him, is greater than him: “Words are also unities that vibrate and have a life of their own. They have their rhythms, harmonies, melodies. In their roots, they conceal the timeless wisdom of all history, to which I am heir. They project a whole framework of connotations” (Flusser 2014: 22). Writing begins then in *listening* to the words and what they are already speaking – the writer must give themselves over to language in their attempt to articulate a burgeoning thought. For a writer like Flusser however, such listening is further complicated by the number of murmuring languages which he can listen to and choose from. “In my memory, there are words from various languages. They don’t mean the same things. Each language possesses its own atmosphere and, as a result, is a universe in itself. It is inexact to say that I command the languages stored in my memory. Of course, I can translate, and in this sense, I transcend them all. In this same sense, I can choose the language in which I would like to write. But in another sense, it is the languages that command me, program and transcend me, for each of them throws me into its own universe. I cannot write without first recognising this power that

the words and the languages exercise over me. It is, furthermore, the root of my choice of the gesture of writing” (Flusser 2014: 23). The search of the writing begins in a resistance to which he must submit, must give himself over to. In his attempt to cast language on thought, he is *thrown* by language, into a world not of his own making, or choosing. The freedom of gesture in this way, the project of assaying an existence, as Flusser notes in the “Skin” essay, always begins with the “given world” – with an inheritance.

The writing begins then in a passivity, in listening, in dispossession – an emptying of self in order to let the language resound, a flow, yet one which cannot flood indefinitely but which, in time, must itself be countered by resistance. The thinking cannot simply be seduced by the “stream of words, to let them flow from within, through the fingers, over the keys of the machine and against the paper...the sheer musical beauty of the words....” (Flusser 2014: 23). The gesture must press against this melliflence if the “virtuality” to be pressed is not to “dissolve”. The pressure of the words which force themselves upon him must, in turn, meet a counter-pressure.

This being pressed and pressing plays out at heterogeneous levels of the writing: “I must first order the words so that the blurred initial thought finds expression. Various orders present themselves. A logical order – and I persuade myself that what I want to express is defending itself against being ordered logically. What is to be expressed must be adjusted. Then on to the grammatical order: and I persuade myself that the two orders do not agree. I begin to play with both orders and to proceed in such a way that what is to be expressed just barely slips between the contradictions of logic and grammar. Then comes orthographic order – and I discover the wonder of the alphabetic code: the function of commas, question marks, the possibility of making paragraphs, of skipping lines, and the inviting possibility of so-called orthographic errors. (Question: Is a deliberate infraction of rules an error?) Yes, I make all these discoveries with my fingers on the keys of the machine. As all this is going on, what was to be expressed is expressed: it is realised. And so, in the course of writing, I am surprised to discover what it was I wanted to

write” (Flusser 2014: 24). The force of a particular language, with its incumbent complexities of rules, rhythms, grammar, semantics, complicate what is to be written – its push and pull, testing and teasing, a challenge to the attempt at thinking. Indeed, without this play and counter-play between the writer and words, and the levels of order to be worked through, there is no gesture of writing, of thinking. It is this movement and counter-movement which, as Flusser articulates, the gesture of writing *is*: “It is not right to say that writing fixes thinking. Writing is a way of thinking. There is no thinking that has not been articulated through a gesture. Thinking before articulation is only a virtuality, which is to say, nothing. It is realised through the gesture. Strictly speaking, there is no thinking before making a gesture” (Flusser 2014: 24). The gesture, the thinking, begins only with this engagement with words. Outside of this tense dialogue, this exchange, this scene of pressure and counter-pressure, thought is only a “virtuality”, a decision, which has not yet met the surface of the skin.

The effort, the dialogue between pressure and counter pressure, establishes, through the process, a particular *rhythm* for the text at hand, in which it will *resonate* – something which Flusser articulates in *Does Writing Have A Future?:* “Texts must flow. Compressed letters, words, sentences, and paragraphs must follow one on the other...Particles of text must be built into a wave structure. It is about rhythm, about layered levels of rhythm. Each single level of letters, words, sentences, and paragraphs must resonate in a rhythm particular to itself, and all must resonate together. Texts must harmonise. A unified pitch must resonate on the musical, lexical, semantic, and logical levels of the text. Only if a text is in harmony can a reader agree or disagree with it, can a reader resonate in sympathy or antipathy” (Flusser 2011: 44). In the encounter of language through the gesture, in the back and forth appropriating and being appropriated by language, the writer establishes a sense not according to expression, or intention, but according to an *organisation*, a certain *configuration* of the text in which relations between elements can resonate. It is a harmony reached between being drawn apart and attempting to draw together.

Such a conception of the relation of rhythm to meaning is evocative of the work of Henri Meschonnic, who, drawing upon Emile Benveniste's reconsideration of the origin of rhythm in its Greek "ruthmos", proposes that rhythm has to do not with *metre* – rhythm as determined by orderly time - but with *form*, that is, as the improvised shape within a temporal movement that is subject to change - a spatial arrangement organised not through a pre-established standard, but through a dynamic relation. Rhythm is the organisation of sense that undoes an understanding of language according to the logic of "the sign" – the dichotomy of signifier/signified, upon which further cultural binaries have played themselves out, in particular, that of form/content. In this way, rhythm, rather than an addendum to meaning, is the organisation of sense which establishes meaning.

Rhythm then is what establishes what Meschonnic calls the "poetic subject" – a subject who is born to an understanding within the process of making, in encountering language in its difference, its non-compliance to structures and schemas, and through this encountering of otherness, the invention, creation, of another organisation of sense, of resonance.

For Meschonnic, any schema of form, any conformism of form where there is the replication of form, a filling-out of form – what amounts to the "anesthetising" text (Flusser 2011: 42), as Flusser calls it, is nothing less than a conformism with schemas of society which seek to reduce the play of the subject, of difference, alterity – the "marketplace of ideas, the marketplace of feelings, of behaviour" (Meschonnic 2011: 163). In simply replicating forms, writers are no more than what Flusser calls "functionaries", and as such "can be replaced by automatic apparatuses in the foreseeable future: publishers by programmed grids, writers by word processors, until finally the alphabet will be abandoned as an ineffective code" (Flusser 2011: 42).

It is a question then, for Meschonnic, of transformation through an unravelling of self: "it is through rhythm that we reach the sense that we have of our being undone, that everything around us happens as it undoes itself, and that, approaching this sensation of the movement of everything, we ourselves are part of this movement" (Meschonnic 2011: 165). The unpredictabil-

ity of this encounter, and its instability, is what constitutes for Meschonnic the *risk* of rhythm – the ethical and political stakes in the gesture of writing.

To relate to language in this way, is to see it not as *tool* which could be used by a subject as if standing outside it, but is that which *comprises* the subject – something which is already working itself on them and framing their existence, their relation to the world, their particular historicity. To engage with the organisation and structure of language in the process of writing, to write according to rhythm, rather than schema, is to place this framework into question, to see it in its *unsettlement*, and with it, the fluctuating skin one is in. As Meschonnic puts it, there is rhythm only if “a form of life transforms a form of language and if reciprocally a form of language transforms a form of life” (Meschonnic 2011: 163), that is, only if there is the risk of the subject’s undoing.

This intersubjective encounter with a particular language, at a particular moment in time, by a writer in their singular historicity, flitting constantly between an active engagement and a passive receptivity, the “rhythm” of the text, amounts to what Flusser calls the “style” of his gesture of writing: “My style is the way I write, which is to say, it is my gesture of writing. *Le style, c’est l’homme*” (Flusser 2014: 24). The form, the aesthetic of the gesture of writing, the “style” which manifests from the intense dialogue with language on the page, *is* the thinking – what happens in-between, through the encounter, in the passage through.

The struggle with words at the various levels, is his attempt at freedom – at deciding himself. Edged at the limit of this scene is the pressing force of death, what grips this gesture in its grappling with language. As he puts it: “The essay is not merely the articulation of a thought, but of a thought as a point of departure for a committed existence. The essay vibrates with the tension of the fight between thought and life, and between life and death, that Unamuno called ‘agony’. Because of this the essay does not resolve its topic as the treatise does. It does not explain its topic, so in this sense it does not inform its readers. On the contrary, it transforms its topic into an enigma. It implicates itself in the topic and in its reader. This is what makes it attractive” (Flusser 2002: 194).

The tense conversing between language and self within the gesture of writing plays out the tension of one's being-in-the-world – that is, it is an attempt to respond to the situation into which one has been cast, by engaging with the limits of being thrown into a particular historicity – the tension between a given world one has absorbed and continues to absorb, coming towards one, and freedom – the attempt to meet this future with a gesture. The effort is on-going, continuous, must always be renewed because of the subject's always having its being to-be.

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“Our change is on the crest. Our living and inventive path follows the fringed, capricious curve where the simple beach of sand meets the noisy rolling in of the waves. A simple and straightforward method gives no information; its uselessness and flatness (or platitude) is finally calculable. Intelligence, we knew, remains unexpected, like invention or grace; it does not surpass the surprising to head toward the anything-under-the-sun. Rigor is never in the simple tending toward the identical and would be nothing without uniting and holding together what should not be associated. There is only something new by the injection of chance in the rule, by the introduction of the law at the heart of disorder. An organisation is born from circumstances, like Aphrodite rising from the sea” (Serres 2007: 128).

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“it is close to *duende*”, she said – “the force which comes only if death is a possibility – Lorca *spoke of its love for the rim of the wound – the sore spot which makes us suffer – is painful, disturbing, but also creative, a force very different from the muse say, or the angel – more bestial, I think, more raucous and daemonic – earthy, not ethereal. The work is to heal its wounding which never closes, perhaps because it is constantly re-opened. It is interesting that it has to do again with the skin, as if the skin, in its porosity is this woundedness, its indefensibility against the strange which it always comes to host.*

In fact, I think Lorca stresses that the duende comes from within, and dwells in the farthest regions of the blood – burning the heart, as he put it – exhausting, rejecting all the order of the world we've learnt, what we already know, smashing styles!

I think it speaks to the way we are bound to ourselves, and bound to the earth. If you think about how the muse and the angel descend from afar, are transcendental, the duende in contrast is corporeal, earthy, exists in the mess – what has to be worked through to pass – the course – like Serres' parasite – the mess as a meal! It would have to do with eating then, absorbing and assimilating, and the perpetual resumption of the dining scene – the endless

task of feeding the body which is our weight, our suffering, what we must confront at every turn – and the body of our writing – this burden of attempting an authentic existence, of making something with internal integrity.

I think the duende has to do with this intimate shadow, this strangeness and darkness, lying at the heart of the familiar. In terms of what you are talking about, I think it does make sense, because the duende comes from being suspended over a gorge, from groundlessness – like what Nietzsche said – when you stare into the abyss, the abyss stares back. In fact, Nietzsche’s heart, for Lorca, was scorched by duende – he was, for him, one of the philosophers who battled fiercely with it. And I think this has to do with philosophy as an art of living, a form of life – the way it is subject to the ravages of time, to the surge of events out of our control, where we are tossed and turned and sometimes flattened. Duende is, I think, about this vulnerability and how even though we expend so much effort in protecting and securing ourselves, this ultimately is not where we dwell, our condition as exposed skins has no ultimate immunity. The duende is the invasion that cannot be prepared for and which will upturn us – an alterity altering the order of our system – interrupting and destroying what we thought we knew”.

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Flusser’s gesture of the skin, the play between being determined by the world and trying to articulate a freedom within it, like Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s “flesh”, is modelled on a *chiasmic* structure of a *reversible* relation – “I happen to the world and the world happens to me” (Flusser 2006: 1) – the inflection of a whole. Rather than a self-constituting subject set against the world, the subject is a part of the world. Merleau-Ponty infamously demonstrates this through the example of the reversibility of touching and being touched within the flesh of our own body – my left hand touching my right hand, which is in turn capable of touching this hand back. So too, with the flesh of the world – I touch the world and am touched by it - I perceive the world and am a perceivable part of the world. What is significant with this chiasm however, is its asymmetry. With the hands of my own body, “I” am more its right hand because I have carried out all of my work and all of my deeds for so long, have turned the things of the world more predominantly with this hand, to the extent that it is almost co-determinant with “me”, whilst my left hand is weaker, softer and more of a “thing” – almost not me at all. Similarly, while the relation to the world is reversible, I am always more on the side of “me” – there is a dehiscence, a spread, a gap between. It is through this hinge, this dynamic in-between that a shift is perceivable, “the metamorphosis of the one experience into the other” (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 148). The counterparts of the whole

of the reversible relation are thus *incongruent*. As an enantiomorphic structure, chiasmus entails the requisite similarity for connection to occur, yet it also involves a difference, a diversity, which can never entail complete connection or identity. The structure of the self of the chiasm of flesh is a self which can only know, perceive, understand, through the *whole* of a movement of taking and being-taken, of grasping and being-grasped, of possessing and being-possessed. “Chiasm..that means that there is not only a me-other rivalry, but a co-functioning. We function as one unique body” (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 215).

Flusser’s gesture of writing can be understood as this dynamic swivelling between, where it speaks to an “act” of coming to know, coming to understand, which is not that of an intentional subject but a dialogical relation carried out at various levels, only some of which have been highlighted here. Gesture is the unity, the enantiomorphic, incongruent whole, where there is no generation of sense, of meaning, outside of the whole movement which passes between activity *and* passivity. As Merleau-Ponty notes: “philosophy cannot be total and active grasp, intellectual possession, since what there is to be grasped is a dispossession...It is the simultaneous experience of the holding and the held in all orders” (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 266). As Flusser chiastically puts it in an unpublished essay, “writing is not a passion, nor is it an action, but something that might be called either an active passion or a passionate action”, where the “writer is a function of the text and the text is a function of the writer” (4 “Scribere Necessare est Vivere non est”). In the gesture of writing, construed here as an essaying, there is no knowing or thinking outwith the gesture, that is, the whole movement back and forth, between. The writer comes to understand within the dialogical exchange, within the creative encounter, the movement in-between, where the structures of language and its orders, the given world, are challenged through what is trying to be articulated, and what is trying to be articulated challenges the structures of language - where thinking is worked by the language and the language worked by the thinking. Gesture follows a logic not of one, or two, but one and two – loss in connection, connection in loss, in the passage between.

Gesture speaks to a thinking which can only be thought to the extent that the subject puts itself into play, allows itself to be *dispossessed* in its attempt to possess – lets itself be encountered. As Giorgio Agamben has put it in his own thoughts on gesture, “The subject – like the author, like the life of the infamous man – is not something that can be directly attained as a substantial reality present in some place; on the contrary, it is what results from the encounter and from the hand-to-hand confrontation with the apparatuses in which it has been put – and has put itself – into play. For writing (any writing, not only the writing of the chancellors of the archive of infamy) is an apparatus too, and the history of human beings is perhaps nothing other than the hand-to-hand confrontation with the apparatuses they have produced – above all with language...so must subjectivity show itself and increase its resistance at the point where its apparatuses capture it and put it into play. A subjectivity is produced where the living being, encountering language and putting itself into play in language without reserve, exhibits in a gesture the impossibility of its being reduced to this gesture. All the rest is psychology, and nowhere in psychology do we encounter anything like an ethical subject, a form of life” (2007: 72). The epilethial reversible relation means that while the subject is determined, captured and schematised, they can never be fully so, can never be defined, but reside in the possibility of deciding a freedom – in a gesture of essaying.

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She returns to the room, their meeting place – a pomegranate in hand – an offering of thanks for their exchange, for this chance to resume where they had left off.

In silence they sit, as she peels the skin carefully, and slowly prises and slips the deep-crimson seeds into a bowl – the sound like a delicate breath on the back of her neck.

The bowl swells to capacity, Marie takes a handful – the burst of juice filling her mouth, as the seeds crack under her teeth, and with this crisp taste, and the words – “I’ve been reading Einstein’s Dreams of late” – the fugue ensues, she feels the surge of a wave, as she lets herself be cast, lets herself fall, all towards this openness –

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