

**VOICES OF TEXTS,
TREES OF KNOWLEDGE
AND
SERGEI'S DREAM OF A SPHERICAL BOOK**

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VOICE

- Texts have always a "voice" or "voices". Someone is speaking, uttering, making noise... or expressing silence.
- The text construes the **one who writes**: positions the one who makes observations, thinks, believes, senses, knows, argues or "speaks" without certainty of what will emerge from the words as they are gathered together.
- It construes the "object" of writing, the matter at hand (the matter in the fragile hold of words).
- Is that matter solid, abstract, tangible, speculative, sensuous, physical, factual, experiential?
- The **voice of a text** construes **the relation** of the one who writes (speaks, thinks, utters) to the matter being written about.
- What is the "**subject**" and what is the "**object**", the *matter* that is thought about.

Artistic research context creates an epistemic tension. **Writing as an epistemic question.**

What do we aim to "know" through and within art/practice?

What is the aim of the "knowledge" we create?

What "type" of knowledge are we after?

In Academic research writing there is an underlying agreed-upon purpose: we aim at expressing "knowledge", "truth claims", "arguments", certainty.

- Is the core of the matter at hand even about "knowledge" in artistic research?

Does the text have only one voice?

- The practical question in artistic research writing: the whole consists of theorizing and expressing processual, experiential or *aesthetic* qualities of art *making/ art as thinking*.
- What is the relation of these elements, is there a demand for the voice to change, vary, fluctuate?
- What is theorizing? What is practice? What is praxis? What is the matter of art?

Different "types" and definitions of knowledge:

*A Priori "from before". What we know without experiencing.
Knowledge based on reasoning. Theoretical knowledge.*

A Posteriori "from what comes after", inductive (empirical knowledge)

Explicit Knowledge (to know what)

Tacit Knowledge (to know how)

Propositional Knowledge (also Descriptive or Declarative Knowledge)
what can be declared or argued for.

**Non-Propositional Knowledge (also Procedural Knowledge) acquired
by doing, does not exist merely as truth claims.**

**Speculative essence of philosophy? Ideas are not facts of the
natural world. Theory within art? Singularity of art.**

Thinking, speculating, within art making?

Aristotle's three human activities:

Theoria (thinking/speculation, looking at), **praxis** (doing),
poiesis (making).

Academic writing as a **style/convention** (plain style/asiatyyli)

What is excluded and why?

Common features of how the parameters of plain style are defined:

Formality: “Academic writing needs to be **formal and impersonal**”. ”clear, concise and professional”

“The most significant difference between academic and non-academic writing is that academic writing puts forward arguments and ideas that are supported by evidence, most often in the form of citing other research or studies”

No subjective first person voice (even though active voice is often encouraged).

“Although there are exceptions (for example, if you are discussing a field trip that you personally took in order to conduct research or interviews that you carried out), **normally academic writing does not make use of the first person.**”

Purposeful

Explicit

Logical

Accurate

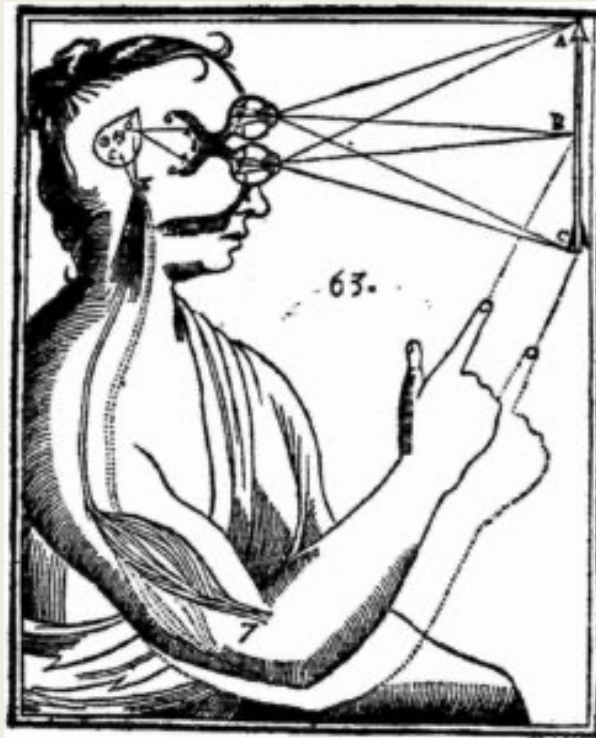
Clarity in the sentence structure

Neutral (= objective)

Illustrative

(Helsinki University Guide for Academic Writing).

Objectivity as a metaphor/ image of the relation btw. the one who knows and what is known.



Mikko Lehtonen
Kyklooppi ja kojootti 1995.

(A Cyclops and a Coyote) (inspired by Gilles Deleuze's & Donna Haraway's conceptions)

The *re*-researcher as a **nomadic subject**,
the “objects” of “knowledge” as phenomena in a
changing lanscape.

Challenging the Cartesian notion of the objects of
“knowledge” as solid, unchangable phenomena,
immune/indifferent to the gaze of the observer
(objectivity)

Quantum physics! Paradigmatic challenge.



Relationality: **Structure as a metaphor.**

- Is making (poiesis) or practise (doing) subordinated within the structure of the text?
- Does this happen throughout the whole (thesis) and at the level of senteces and paragraphs?
- Does the structure of the thesis communicate **hiarachies between theory and practice/art?**
- **Tree as a metaphor of a structure. The trunk. The branches.**

Other kinds of metaphors for the structure?

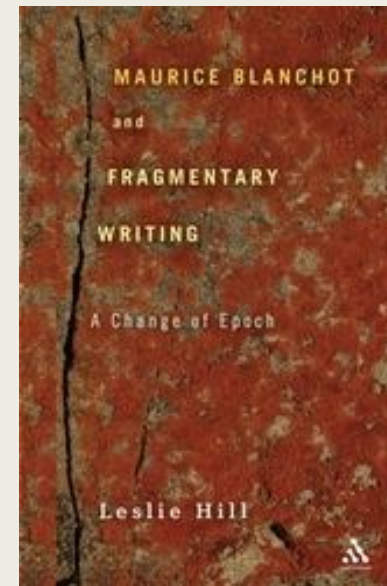
Rhizomes

- Gilles Deleuze ja Félix Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus* (1972-1980) & *Capitalism and Schizophrenia project*(1972).
- The traditional root-like book: mimesis of nature. The idea of knowledge (art, thinking) as a mimetic image of nature, the world.
- Deleuze & Guattari challenge the tree-like/ root-like concept of a book as an outdated and impossible concept.
- Proposing the idea of a *rhizomatic writing*.
- The **emergent** nature of “reality”. Reality as an ever-changing monistic process which has no beginning or end.
- Writing as *getting lost* which eventually leads to getting *there*. What is “there”?

Fragmentary writing
of **Walter Benjamin's**
philosophical essays.

Montage of “thought images”.

Image-like crystallizations.
Crystals of insights.



Walter Benjamin:
On the Concept of History
c.1940, unpublished during
Benjamin's lifetime.

I

There was once, we know, an automaton constructed in such a way that it could respond to every move by a chess player with a countermove that would ensure the winning of the game.¹ A puppet wearing Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent on all sides. Actually, a hunchbacked dwarf—a master at chess—sat inside and guided the puppet's hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophic counterpart to this apparatus. The puppet, called "historical materialism,"² is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is small and ugly and has to keep out of sight.

II

"It is one of the most noteworthy peculiarities of the human heart," writes Lotze, "that so much selfishness in individuals coexists with the general lack of envy which every present day feels toward its future."³ This observation indicates that the image of happiness we cherish is thoroughly colored by the time to which the course of our own existence has assigned us. There is happiness—such as could arouse envy in us—only in the air we have breathed, among people we could have talked to, women who could have given themselves to us. In other words, the idea of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the idea of redemption. The same applies to the idea of the

V

The true image of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again. "The truth will not run away from us": this statement by Gottfried Keller

On the Concept of History · 391

indicates exactly that point in historicism's image of history where the image is pierced by historical materialism.⁶ For it is an irretrievable image of the past which threatens to disappear in any present that does not recognize itself as intended in that image.

VI

Articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it "the way it really was."⁷ It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to hold fast that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to the historical subject in a moment of danger. The danger threatens both the content of the tradition and those who inherit it. For both, it is one and the same thing: the danger of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. Every age must strive anew to wrest tradition away from the conformism that is working to overpower it. The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer; he comes as the victor over the Antichrist. The only historian capable of fanning the spark of hope in the past is the one who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he is victorious. And this enemy has never ceased to be victorious.

IX

My wing is ready for flight,
I would like to turn back.
If I stayed everliving time,
I'd still have little luck.

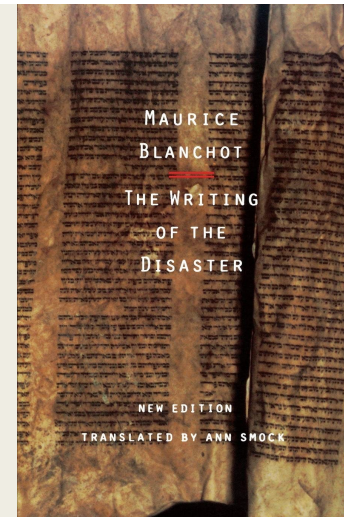
—Gerhard Scholem, “Greetings from the Angelus”¹²

There is a picture by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. It shows an angel who seems about to move away from something he stares at.¹³ His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before *us*, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is *this* storm.

Maurice Blanchot (1907-2003)

French writer, philosopher, literary theorist

- "[...]literature begins at the moment when literature becomes a question[...]"
- *L'écriture du désastre*, 1980 (*The Writing of the Disaster*)



◆ The disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact. It does not touch anyone in particular; “I” am not threatened by it, but spared, left aside. It is in this way that I am threatened; it is in this way that the disaster threatens in me that which is exterior to me—an other than I who passively become other. There is no reaching the disaster. Out of reach is he whom it threatens, whether from afar or close up, it is impossible to say: the infiniteness of the threat has in some way broken every limit. We are on the edge of disaster without being able to situate it in the future: it is rather always already past, and yet we are on the edge or under the threat, all formulations which would imply the future—that which is yet to come—if the disaster were not that which does not come, that which has put a stop to every arrival. To think the disaster (if this is possible, and it is not possible inasmuch as we suspect that the disaster is thought) is to have no longer any future in which to think it.

The disaster is separate; that which is most separate.

When the disaster comes upon us, it does not come. The disaster is its imminence, but since the future, as we conceive of it in the order of lived time, belongs to the disaster, the disaster has always

already withdrawn or dissuaded it; there is no future for the disaster, just as there is no time or space for its accomplishment.

◆ *He does not believe in the disaster. One cannot believe in it, whether one lives or dies. Commensurate with it there is no faith, and at the same time a sort of disinterest, detached from the disaster. Night; white, sleepless night—such is the disaster: the night lacking darkness, but brightened by no light.*

◆ The circle, uncurled along a straight line rigorously prolonged, reforms a circle eternally bereft of a center.

◆ “False” unity, the simulacrum of unity, compromises it better than any direct challenge, which, in any case, is impossible.

◆ Would writing be to become, in the book, legible for everyone, and indecipherable for oneself? (Hasn't Jabès almost told us this?)

◆ If disaster means being separated from the star (if it means the decline which characterizes disorientation when the link with fortune from on high is cut), then it indicates a fall beneath disastrous necessity. Would law be the disaster? The supreme or extreme law, that is: the excessiveness of uncodifiable law—that to which we are destined without being party to it. The disaster is not our affair and has no regard for us; it is the heedless unlimited; it cannot be measured in terms of failure or as pure and simple loss.

Nothing suffices to the disaster; this means that just as it is foreign to the ruinous purity of destruction, so the idea of totality cannot delimit it. If all things were reached by it and destroyed—all gods and men returned to absence—and if nothing were substituted for everything, it would still be too much and too little. The disaster is not of capital importance. Perhaps it renders death vain. It does not superimpose itself upon dying's scope for withdrawal, filling in the void. Dying sometimes gives us (wrongly, no doubt), not the feeling of abandoning ourselves to the disaster, but the feeling that if we were to die, we would escape it. Whence the illusion that

suicide liberates (but consciousness of the illusion does not dissipate it or allow us to avoid it). The disaster, whose blackness should be attenuated—through emphasis—exposes us to a certain idea of passivity. We are passive with respect to the disaster, but the disaster is perhaps passivity, and thus past, always past, even in the past, out of date.

◆ *The disaster takes care of everything.*

◆ The disaster: not thought gone mad; not even, perhaps, thought considered as the steady bearer of its madness.

◆ The disaster, depriving us of that refuge which is the thought of death, dissuading us from the catastrophic or the tragic, dissolving our interest in will and in all internal movement, does not allow us to entertain this question either: what have you done to gain knowledge of the disaster?

◆ The disaster is related to forgetfulness—forgetfulness without memory, the motionless retreat of what has not been treated—the immemorial, perhaps. To remember forgetfully: again, the outside.

◆ “Have you suffered for knowledge's sake?” This is asked of us by Nietzsche, on the condition that we not misunderstand the word “suffering”: it means, not so much what we undergo, as that which goes under.¹ It denotes the *pas* [“not”] of the utterly passive, withdrawn from all sight, from all knowing. Unless it be the case that knowledge—because it is not knowledge of the disaster, but knowledge as disaster and knowledge disastrously—carries us, carries us off, deports us (whom it smites and nonetheless leaves untouched), straight to ignorance, and puts us face to face with ignorance of the unknown so that we forget, endlessly.

◆ The disaster: stress upon minutiae, sovereignty of the accidental. This causes us to acknowledge that forgetfulness is not negative or that the negative does not come after affirmation (affirmation negated), but exists in relation to the most ancient, to what would

the affirmation—of the singularity of the extreme? The disaster or the unverifiable, the improper.

- ◆ There is no solitude if it does not disrupt solitude, the better to expose the solitary to the multiple outside.
 - ◆ Immobile forgetfulness (memory of the immemorable): so would the disaster without desolation be de-scribed, in the passivity of a letting-go which does not renounce, does not announce anything if not the undue return. Perhaps we know the disaster by other, perhaps joyful names, reciting all words one by one, as if there could be for words an all.
 - ◆ *The calm, the burn of the holocaust, the annihilation of noon—the calm of the disaster.*
 - ◆ He is not excluded, but like someone who would no longer enter anywhere.
 - ◆ Penetrated by passive gentleness, he has, thus, something like a presentiment—remembrance of the disaster which would be the gentlest want of foresight. We are not contemporaries of the disaster: that is its difference, and this difference is its fraternal threat. The disaster would be in addition, in excess, an excess which is marked only as impure loss.
 - ◆ Inasmuch as the disaster is thought, it is nondisastrous thought, thought of the outside. We have no access to the outside, but the outside has always already touched us in the head, for it is the precipitous.
- The disaster, that which disestablishes itself—disestablishment without destruction's penalty. The disaster comes back; it would always be the disaster after the disaster—a silent, harmless return whereby it dissimulates itself. Dissimulation, effect of disaster.
- ◆ *“But there is, in my view, no grandeur except in gentleness.” (S. W.)² I*

will say rather: nothing extreme except through gentleness. Madness through excess of gentleness, gentle madness.

To think, to be effaced: the disaster of gentleness.

- ◆ *“There is no explosion except a book.” (Mallarmé.)*
- ◆ The disaster, unexperienced. It is what escapes the very possibility of experience—it is the limit of writing. This must be repeated: the disaster de-scribes. Which does not mean that the disaster, as the force of writing, is excluded from it, is beyond the pale of writing or extratextual.
- ◆ *It is dark disaster that brings the light.*
- ◆ The horror—the honor—of the name, which always threatens to become a title.³ In vain the movement of anonymity remonstrates with this supernumerary appellation—this fact of being identified, unified, fixed, arrested in the present. The commentator says (be it to criticize or to praise): this is what you are, what you think; and thus the thought of writing—the ever-dissuaded thought which disaster awaits—is made explicit in the name; it receives a title and is ennobled thereby; indeed, it is as if saved—and yet, given up. It is surrendered to praise or to criticism (these amount to the same): it is, in other words, promised to a life surpassing death, survival. Boneyard of names, heads never empty.
- ◆ The fragmentary promises not instability (the opposite of fixity) so much as disarray, confusion.
- ◆ Schleiermacher: By producing a work, I renounce the idea of my producing and formulating myself; I fulfill myself in something exterior and inscribe myself in the anonymous continuity of humanity—whence the relation between the work of art and the encounter with death: in both cases, we approach a perilous threshold, a crucial point where we are abruptly *turned back*. Likewise, Friedrich Schlegel on the aspiration to dissolve in death: “The human is every-

Sergei Eisenstein: The dream of a spherical book

- “It is very hard to write a book. Because each book is two dimensional. I wanted this book to be characterized by a feature that does not fit under any circumstances into the two-dimensionality of a printing element. This demand has two aspects. First, it supposes that the bundle of these essays is not to be regarded successively. In any case, I wish that one could perceive them all at the same time, simultaneously, because they finally represent a set of sectors, which are **arranged around a general, determining viewpoint, aligned to different areas.** “

- “On the other hand, I want to create a spatial form that would make it possible to step from each contribution directly into another and to make apparent their interconnection ... Such a synchronic manner of circulation and mutual penetration of the essays can be carried out only in the form (...) of a sphere. But **unfortunately, books are not written as spheres** ... I can only hope that they will be read according to the method of mutual reversibility, a spherical method - in expectation that we will learn to write books like rotating balls. Now we have only books like soap-bubbles. Particularly on art.”