

'The Speaking System'

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**the more I say the less you understand:**

(an argument for ebbing entries in the Dictionary  
or of the future expansion of language  
in a lexicon of interpretation)

**the more you say the less I have to:**

(the difference between using a thesaurus  
– which has of course an index –  
and the dictionary  
which is an index but  
I'll explain that to myself another time)

**the more we say the less opportunity there is for dialogue:**

(language is a system according to its Science  
but, as Frederick Nietzsche agonised, to the contrary,  
the condition of understanding is a baroque discipline)

**the more I say about nothing the more you listen:**

(a fugue echoes in decorative space  
yet a word has no depth in which to reverberate  
unless I'm in a Devious corner  
where the retort is evident to everyone  
apart from the orator)

**the more I say less, the more you listen:**

(other longstanding arguments:  
maybe you're 'doing things with words'  
it could be that they're passive or active  
or it's an interpretation through Form  
*ekphrasis* to the Ancient Greeks)

**the more you listen, the less I say:**

(a political question is raised:  
the Labour of meaning  
– who occupies its territory? –  
it takes a lot of effort to comprehend  
it would destabilise Time and Capital  
if the obligation were upturned)

**the more we say nothing, the more we say:**

(*poesis* is the long way round and

elision doesn't eradicate or evacuate  
what was meant but  
you try to excuse yourself:  
you drank too much and blabbed  
about things better off suppressed)

**say nothing, say it:**

(forget: Body Language  
politesse, page fillers  
puffed up, iron-on t-shirt slogans)

**did I leave something out?**

(apart from Expletives  
the realm of non-verbal Indistinction is ardently  
underrated)

**I said nothing:**

(which happens even to the most verbose of Characters  
– myself included –  
only the conversation is one-sided)

**nothing:**

(O  
0  
o  
Google Translate)

**I saw you today. I saw what you meant:**

(its radical recursive strategy has come  
and what remains behind, the Excess,  
is subsumed into an organising principle  
and it's the same System of Dialogue)

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**Let's start simply... *Eighty-Four Doors* establishes that there is no common 'language' in its presentation of image, text or voice because:**

1. The textual content of the book is a structure unto itself, relinquished as it is to algorithms;
2. As a System, mimesis has no content or meaning;
3. While the on-screen characters in the film of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* have relationships, there there is no room for 'mutual intelligibility' (a circumstance in which comprehension can occur between people of different language groups);
4. What is produced in the effort to 'understand' is the event of a language, but its content is never present in the real, nonetheless the bridging or crossing made *is* a language and this is also a substance.

**The reprise beyond mimesis**

Does *Eighty-Four Doors* simply repeat the text, or does it inflect or reflect on George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*? It doesn't. If you've read the original book, or seen the film, you do. And what happens when Google translate is employed, not as a tool for the sensible, but as an apparatus in itself? This assumption is the same for the machinic tool, which acts like an erstwhile human, yet, while the text is processed via hundreds of languages, often from and to English, it is not actually 'translated'. The difference with the *lingua franca* is the human quotient, where a third language makes communication possible, systematically bridging the incomprehensible that usually comprises the divide of alien tongues.

Pailthorpe's *Eighty-Four Doors* vacates all dialogue from director Michael Radford's 1984 cinema production of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The footage is roughly cut just at the point of the character's speech, and is projected on two A5 pieces of paper, using a split screen technique. John Hurt's Winston Smith is seen on one page, as Julia, played by Suzanna Hamilton, appears on the other. Unlike the film, both characters are viewed at once. Below this, the ultimate Google translation of Orwell's text is typed out in white on a black band at the bottom of the page. The actors go to speak but splutter and choke as their utterances are cut out. What should be a play of thwarted desire is instead inarticulation and disjunction. Richard Burton enters as O'Brien, the torturer. And the literal violence is refigured here into a somewhere between gagging and disembodiment. In both cases the voice that has been banished is still present, just spatialised. Not hearing, being the equivalent of not seeing, makes for a new passage to thinking, so that, according to Gilles Deleuze, '...thought which is born in thought, the act of thinking ... is a thought without image. But what is such a thought, and how does it operate in the world?' (Deleuze 1968: 167)

For Plato, *poesis* was at the crux of the dilemma of representation, and in *The Republic* he spent some time explaining that truth could be exemplified as it was manifest in the world of form but not simply as a one-dimensional depiction, for we may be able to think of *it* but *it* might not be visible. The injunction of perception made access to this 'thought' difficult. Especially in representational forms, which could only partly replicate truth. Poesis introduced a third projective image, an imitation of an imitation, at another remove from the truth.

#### **Algorithm: a system for the undecidable elements of the system**

In Algorithmic Logic this impasse is spanned by a *lingua characterica* or 'formula language', its unique symbols able to engage in unadorned thought.

No human being can write fast enough, or long enough, or small enough ("smaller and smaller without limit ...you'd be trying to write on molecules, on atoms, on electrons") to list all members of an enumerably infinite set by writing out their names, one after another, in some notation. But humans can do something equally useful, in the case of certain enumerably infinite sets: They can give explicit instructions for determining the *n*th member of the set, for arbitrary finite *n*... (Boolos and Jeffrey 1974, 1999:19)

Emanating from this same mathematical school, in the mid-1930s, the conundrum of the 'decision problem' (*Entscheidungsproblem*) was posed. Algorithm was consequently used to define the role of decidability, which remains crucial as the root of formal systems and their origins in a small set of axioms and rules.

In *Eighty-Four Doors* an 'undecidable' quotient drives the 'translation' procedure and is also the immaterial product of the 'crossing'. Yet translation itself disavows both the zone of dissonant productivity at the intersection: one cannot go beyond the ideological matrix of language in or through language. Again, Plato rejoinders: *ekphrasis*, the rhetorical device in which one art form translates another thus encapsulating more compellingly the essence of the thing.

### **Alain Badiou theorises the ethics of deciding on the undecidable**

Badiou's primary ethical axiom, directed at the human subject, states that we must make a choice, in order to 'decide upon the undecidable'. But the big problem for philosophy would be how the subject might identify the 'indiscernible'. Badiou turns to mathematics and set theory in particular, to solve the problem of where multiplicity and infinity of nothing can be 'put, or alternatively, how it should exist outside of itself. Badiou does not stop there, he advocates for the return of the subject, in temporal changing openness (he calls this the event). Love, science, politics and art offer *the* four domains in which a subject might become an active subject, holding in a choice action of fidelity, as he argues, to the transforming life-truth of an event.

If you're wondering what the link is between algorithms and Badiou's theories, both determine that a system better serves to release the human subject from its self-determined containment in thought. *Eighty-Four Doors* thus crosses the junction of two philosophical paradigms, and one does not of course preclude the existence of the other. You don't have to subscribe to any such school of thought (I don't) but simply use the very ethic of the undecidable to shift or transfer through the conceptual and perceptual space.

### **Projected images return as algorithms of dissonant (or undecidable) thought**

The pieces of paper in Pailthorpe's installation, on which the footage and the text project, displace the dialogical text from the on-screen character in much the same way that, conversely, the algorithm left the page, allowing for the computer calculation of infinite sums. In *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (2005), Deleuze argues that the post-war condition and the material experience of society is one and the same with the shift towards a cinema of fragmentation and montage and the (particularly perceptual) effect of screen images.

The allegorical operation of cinematic and other perceptually related uses of montage is also central to German philosopher Walter Benjamin's conceptual methodology. The notion that montage generates a zone of dissonance was, for Benjamin, a procedure that he applied to writing and to images and to the nexus of the two. Something akin to the 'undecidable' is bred in the space where meaning cannot be fixed, which Susan Buck-Morss, in *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, calls dialectical thinking (Susan Buck-Morss, 1989). This, Buck-Morss explains, is realised in Benjamin's juxtaposition of writing and dialectical imagery, where past and present interact with one another, as the method and subject of a critical revision and reprisal of history, enacted through the practice of montage, of which Benjamin's epic yet unfinished *Passagen-Werk* (or *Arcades*) project (1927–1940) was an embodiment.

The late cinematic work of Jean-Luc Godard is instructive of this method too. In a dissertation from 2009, titled *Border Crossings: writing, confinement and the voice*, I examined the role of dissonance in Godard's films. The following two paragraphs are an extract from that text.

In Godard's *Nouvelle Vague* (1990) sound is given as much if not more credence than the image, with an abundance of acoustic sources that tumble over each other. The effect is cacophonous, especially as one dialogue overrides and effaces another, building to a bedlam of six, seven and even eight independent voices speaking at once. At other points, silence intervenes and swamps the diegesis. Constant shifts between internal and external sound also exacerbate the most natural of sounds; and naturalistic sounds turn up out of context, or slightly out of synch. A squawking seabird is heard just after the camera has moved indoors, the sound of the sea slapping on a boat is heard in very close proximity to the ear, a woman's high-pitched throat singing is contrapuntal to a tranquil lake shot, and loud trumpets sound in the middle of a restaurant scene. The murmuring of *Nouvelle Vague's* off-screen voices and their dissonant conjunction takes the ties that logically bind the image to the audio track, and stretches both sound and image across film.

What emanates from the polyphonic personae of 'him' (Alain Delon's slippery character), and the classy multi-lingual woman, 'her' (played by Domiziana Giordano), is a critique of the attempt to corral the mind and how this can prevent a person from experiencing the liberation of unguarded otherness (and efforts to suppress this openness end up in death or disposal of the 'other'). The couple builds a hall of mirrors: they are not divided nor are they united. We hear their voices, but also the voices of many others – even ourselves – so that during the process of identification with the figures (man/woman, him/her) we gradually perceive the form of the individual as utterly contingent. This 'otherness' arguably brings about a dissolution of borders, for in *Nouvelle Vague* there are no boundaries between any of the characters, times or places. The film's structure, moreover, is not overtly articulated at any point but is conveyed by splices of dialogue, inner thoughts, floods of music, acoustic effects, field recordings, quotations without references, voices, title pages and an array of visual and aural impressions. [The acoustic component of this concoction is so affective that it is easy to imagine it as a separate work, a film without pictures. As testament, in 1997 ECM Records released the complete soundtrack of *Nouvelle Vague*, including its dialogue, music, sound and silences.]

The dialectic of image–text that plays out in *Eighty-Four Doors* is equally explicit in its visual arrangement of footage and type text, as it steps in to rescue us from undecidable (ill)literation. Its dissolving non-space of image-text relations throws us into the perceptual zone of intelligible dialogue, but only because the words have been excised (and perhaps, as Badiou might conceive of it, have been placed in an empty set), allowing the observer, arguably a generative participant, to enter *into* and become a montage – and see or 'voice' themselves within the imaginary intersubjective domain of Winston–Julia and Winston–O'Brien.

I'm quite comforted by this, as Roland Barthes seemed to be, because I'd rather love the *him* that is *I* than the *he* that I love (Barthes, 1978). Disbanded as I am from the image of myself; a subject and an entity lost after having tried to listen to the empty sounds of *Eighty-Four Doors*.

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