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Writing against time

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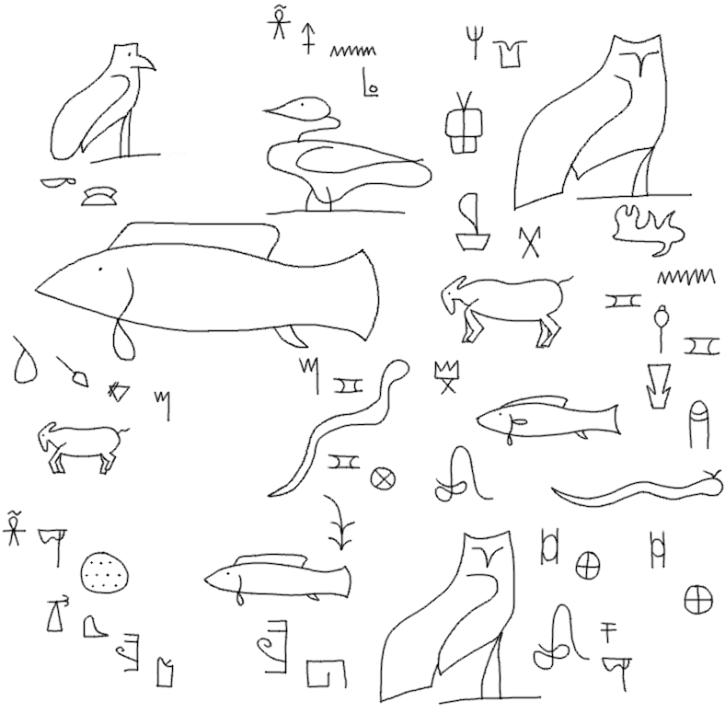
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And this we can read continuously: indifferently, unstably, unfixedly. Each sign is a letter and not a letter and not not a letter; an animal or a plant; a symbol or a gesture. The owls are a letter O or an animal or both or neither, and are the same and not the same, or are both the same and not the same, or are neither the same nor not the same. The fish dominant or close by in the top left is a letter E and is not a letter E but is the same as the fish below it, and is not not a letter nor the fish below it, or is both and neither. Insects, fawns, caterpillars are letters N, E, and U, or are not those letters but form unstable constellations with other letters living as plants, and are entangled or not entangled with waves which are and are not and are not not letters L and which are and are not and are not not gestures to rivers and ponds nearby, marking perhaps where I write them or where you read them. Again weights and shields and tangled strings are letters E and TO and O or are not these but are symbols or are not symbols but are plants, or are all of these in simultaneous unstable movements, rhythmic emergence of conventional legibility, symbolic legibility, living legibility, and again rhythmic disappearance of any or all of the three. The arrows mark the soaring of eagles or the letter I or the ascent of the cormorant resting beside them, or again all of these or none of these or some of these. Letters are there and not there and not not-there, deferring the linear unfolding of concepts, complicating the constitution of syntheses, complicating the reign of time.

Protention and retention, and thus the bleedthrough of time in the form of the present, are not altogether erased here, as they are not on the Dark Age vases. This can only be a first step. But reading continuously, in this way or another, deeper way yet to be developed, allows us to move further and further towards the world of continuous unfolding, of indifferent, unstable, unfixed simultaneity – the world of presence beyond the form of the present and beyond time.

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here to some extent, tying echoes and rhythms together on the vase's tapestry, they remain unstable and unfixed. The concepts which governed Lefebvre's notion of bodily spatial depth, alienating it into the form of the present and the work of the concept, are here everywhere attacked, leaving patterns gesturing to the indifferent continuous simultaneity of simultaneities. Bands of animals are so many gestures and movements, so many constellations and dissolutions, so many rhythms creating and destroying shapes and patterns, gesturing to so many simultaneously unfolding sounds and sights and smells, so many mergers of insides and outsides.

We too can write in this way, and thus we too can conjure the unfolding of the indifferent, unstable, and indeterminate world beyond time – the world of simultaneity. Thus we can take the linear unfolding of the concept of a tree in (as) time (“a tree consists of roots in the soil, a stem emerging, branches shooting off, and leaves sprouting”) and rewrite it in such a way that the concept loses its sway and the tree's conjuring on the page is there and not there, and not not-there, like the wind-wolf and the dance of leaves:

juxtaposing and separating them, indeterminately delineating and mixing them. This unfolding is ongoing: it establishes a continuous simultaneity beginning at my birth and ending at my death, knowing neither divisions nor breaks. Beyond time, waking and dream mix and morph into one another, and I am no more awake than I am asleep, or I am both awake and asleep, or I am neither awake nor asleep. As inside and outside of my head are indifferent, unstable, and indeterminate, so are the movements and rhythmic pulses echoing back and forth into and out of and through and beyond them. Beyond time, life is not a series of alienated rooms but a continuous unfolding of one continuous experience – one single indifferent, unstable indeterminacy – rhythmically coming and going, now lit and luminous, now dark and frightening, now friendly and curious, now scary and violent. Beyond time, there is neither now nor earlier nor later, but a single continuous simultaneity of simultaneities indifferently becoming one another, none any more isolated than not isolated, none any more stable than not stable, none any more determinate than indeterminate, and all swaying in patterns and cycles. Beyond time, my ageing too becomes part of the inside which is no more inside than it is outside, which unstably becomes the outside, which indeterminately envelops the outside. I am the world and the world is me, our unfolding embracing itself in a continuous rhythm.

4) Writing simultaneity

Simultaneity is thus the vantage point from which we can think an unfolding of presence without time bleeding through. The rhythmic patterns of Dark Age proto-writing gestured at such a concept. Rhythm creates and dissolves unstable patterns, morphing into one another in continuous indeterminacy, synaesthetically unfolding in never-ending cyclical indifference. Thus, while protention and retention do remain

Time has nothing to do with the cycles of day and night, the moon's orbit, or the voyage of the earth around the sun and its seasons. For the birds snatching worms in receding tidal waves, "sequence exists, rhythm exists, but not time"¹. Time imposes regularity and precision. It domesticates my body and punishes it towards accumulating deadened labor. The Roman poet Ennius rejected *otium*, leisure unstructured by time, because there "the mind does not know what it wants"². Medieval monks were subject to rigidly timed discipline, as are factory workers in industrial capitalism. The basis for Taylorist scientific management of factory labor is "the time taken to react to a given impression"³. Today, smartphones dictate delivery times, risking couriers' life and limb. Time is an "inescapable beat, restricting and coercing us, mirroring blind authority itself"⁴. It is a reification destroying the real unfolding of the world.

How can we escape time's regime? It bounces back from each attempt to reform its pernicious ubiquity. Most revolutionary movements involved, in one form or another, the smashing of clocks. Yet just as significantly, every new regime emerging from the revolution has put those same clocks back into operation. Today, the memes of Antiwork redds revolve around smashing alarm clocks. Yet just as significantly, the memes are timed and by their timing accumulated in comment threads, generating likes and clicks and 'exposure'. Like every other civilized artifice, time cannot be reformed: it needs to be destroyed. But to destroy it, we need a way to articulate,

¹ John Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness* (Port Townsend: Feral House, 2002), 75.

² Ennius, *Iphigenia*, fragment 84, line 5 in Sander Goldberg and Gesine Manuwald (eds.), *Fragmentary Republican Latin vol. II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 89.

³ Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1948), 100.

⁴ Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness*, 20.

however imperfectly, a vantage point from which we can think against time.

1) How presence becomes The Present

As I watch the birds and mosses, listen to the wind and water, and slowly reshape the stone in my lap, I know intuitively that the vantage point opposing time is presence: the marvel of the world unfolding in and through and all around me. If I am to think against time, then, I need to analyze how time comes to reify presence into the present, opposing it to the past and the future on its linear path to accumulation and progress.

From the perspective of time, the concept of presence is structurally unthinkable without the form of the present. The concept of presence entails a series of relations of being-present: my pen is present to me and I to it, this stone is present to me and I to it, and so forth. Likewise, the concept entails the opposite of presence, namely absence. This comes as a series of relations of not-being-present: you the reader are not present to me and I am not to you, the birds on the sea shore are not present to me and I am not present to them, and so forth.

Yet such relations of absence are really relations of deferred presence: protention, pointing to the future, and retention, pointing to the past. Absence manifests firstly as the presence of protention in the form of anticipations. You the reader are absent to me because you are not currently present to me, but this entails the expectation that you might be in the future. Thus your absence is an absence in the present which is nonetheless present to me as the anticipated succession of your presence projected into the future. Your absence is thus thought in the form of the present, as a deferral to the future, rather than as a fullness of presence. Secondly, absence manifests as the presence of retention, typically in the form

‘Indifferent’ means here not that it is ethically negligible but that things “are not, in their real natures, any different from one another...because they do not have real natures of a sort that would permit such differentiation”²⁸. There is not ‘a tree’, organized in linear protentions and retentions by its concept, but a simultaneity of sounds, sights, smells, touches, merging with other such simultaneities and yet also distinct from them in a continuous to-and-fro. Nor is there an image of the tree in my head, separated by an inside-outside distinction, but racing impulses and inverted images simultaneously unfolding with the tree and against it and around it and through it as it morphs and merges and indifferently unfolds.

Thus the world beyond time is also unstable, as it is full of simultaneities that “do not have any fixed natures”²⁹, i.e., are not organized by conceptual linearity. I can call them a tree and a pond and a cloud but my doing so is also just another noise indifferently mixing with the world, warmth of breath exuding from my body continuous with them and my impression of them. Thus try as I might to fix them, the world of simultaneity is also full of simultaneities that are unfixed, that is, that “do not have any definite features”³⁰. The tree and the sky and the pond and my images of them are there and not there and not not-there in the same way that a wind-wolf is there and not there and not not-there in the tall grass, or the way a group of leaves seems to make an indistinct total motion at once there in each of them and not there for all of them and yet not not-there in each and all of them; a dance as reality.

There is no ‘me’ jumping linearly from tree to cloud to road as though I was reading a tableau or scanning a screen. Continuously, the world unfolds through me in an indifferent rhythmic morphing or colors, shapes, sounds and smells, unstably

²⁸ Ibid, 28.

²⁹ Ibid, 28-29.

³⁰ Ibid, 29.

I don't see a group of trees by a pond under a grey sky; these compartmentalizations are written by the linearity of conceptual time. I don't just see but also feel the wind; I hear the rustling of leaves and birds flapping their wings; I taste the wind and smell the flowers; I sense humidity and rain in the air like a brooding foreboding. I myself am physically present in the scene; the colors bounce off my eyes and as they do so set off impulses which traverse my nerves, resulting in a scenery inside me, just as the smells and sounds of flowers or water, rustling or flapping touch my ear drums and smell receptors, resulting in signals too and a world inside me, and again just as my skin's pores and hairs and nerve-endings register wind and humidity bouncing off them, sending signals across my body and generating again a world inside me.

All of this happens simultaneously but not in the synthesis of the form of the present. Time's vantage point would be that of the present: colors, smells, noises all arranged as a scenery or tableau unfolding along the lines of the concept; now the bark's brown, now the water's blue, now the sky's grey. We know that the heart of this scenery is the concept. So we can now think against the concept and construct a vantage point of simultaneity.

Simultaneously, sight, sound, warmth, pressure, humidity, smell, and myriad other movements move through our bodies whose sensations create counter-images, simultaneously establishing a continuous flow inside and outside ourselves, inside and outside of the colors and smells, sensations and sights. The world of simultaneity does not begin and end with my body and entails no arrangement of presences and absences. Rather it is, to borrow a phrase from the ancient philosopher Pyrrhon, "equally indifferent, unstable, and indeterminate"²⁷.

²⁷ Richard Bett, *Pyrrho, His Antecedents, And His Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 16. In terms of conventional philosophical history, Pyrrhon is typically classified as a skeptic. Bett's reading, however, makes much more sense.

of memories. Thus the birds are absent to me because they are not currently in my presence, but this entails the memory that they have been in the past. Their absence is an absence in the present, which is nonetheless present to me as the affective surplus of their presence retained from the past⁵.

The same goes for pen and stone, which are currently present to me, as reinforced by their absence in the past (when I was sleeping) and in the future (when I am alienated). Their presence, too, is thought in the form of the present. Thus from time's vantage point, presence is structurally unthinkable without the form of the present.

In my effort to think against time, I might object that this may well be so, but it does not show that presence always comes in the form of the present. Rather, this protention and retention business illustrates the poverty of a concept of presence derived ultimately from what Heidegger called the world of *Zuhandenheit*: the world where pens and stones and birds alike are present to my hand, i.e., to my using them as discrete, reified tools. Presence is reduced to the present, my objection continues, only in a world which is already subject to time, a world of tools waiting for me to pick them up. In this world, indeed, absence is deferred presence and thus absence in the present, and presence is current presence and thus again presence in the present. But this just means that a fuller, more intuitive concept of presence is needed.

Sure enough, such concepts exist. Henri Lefebvre in particular has posited such a fuller, more intuitive vision of presence in the experience of lived space, where "space is actually experienced, in its depths, as duplication, echoes and reverbera-

⁵ See Edmund Husserl's analyses of the phenomenology of internal time consciousness and passive syntheses, which are edited in their original German in the *Husserliana*; especially vol. X, pp. 13 onwards, and vol. XI, pp. 354 onwards.

tions, redundancies and doublings-up”⁶. Within such a space, presence is a physical intelligibility, an energetic exchange unfolding “between the body and its space, between the body’s deployment in space and its occupation of space;” here, “each living body is space and has its space”⁷. Lefebvre here echoes Maurice Merleau-Ponty, for whom the world is likewise a bodily, spatial experience⁸. To both, space is presence on the level of an originary, physical intuition – an experience prior to the world of things and time. The body’s “rhythm invests places, but is not itself a place; it is not a thing, nor an aggregation of things, nor yet a single flow...Every rhythm possesses and occupies a spatio-temporal reality”⁹. Can these rhythms of bodies in space provide a notion of presence which is not susceptible to the form of the present?

In Lefebvre’s vision, the depths of space are present because they are filled with rhythm. Energy flows from my body – heat, smell, moisture, sound – bounces off surfaces, explores depths, returns to me and is reflected from me back into space. Presence thus emanates from my body, unfolds through my body and returns to my body. That is, presence is layered and synaesthetic. My bodily warmth pulses through my space, bounces off surfaces close to me, refracts further to surfaces further away, warms their depths, dissipates into the atmosphere. My touch clings to surfaces, clasping this, caressing that, alters arrangements, leaves hesitation marks. My smell protrudes through the room, vanishes into the open air, returns to me mixed with that of others, the animals, the plants. My gaze bounces off visible surfaces, embeds them into depth-perception, establishes them as objects near and far.

⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1991), 184.

⁷ *Ibid*, 170.

⁸ David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (New York: Vintage Books, 2017), 30-53.

⁹ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 206.

contain an element of rhythmic cyclicity which is not linear, and an element of deviating freedom which is not ritualistic²⁵.

All this came about because the Dark Age Greeks knew and wrote rhythms against time. Their pottery is a vivid example of thinking against time by writing against it. On the earliest Dark Age vases, in the twelfth century BC, rhythmic repetitions of wavy lines show a keen sense of cyclicity. But wide open spaces on the vases indicate a sense of freedom keeping these rhythms beyond time. By the tenth century, bands of animals are wrapped around the vases, embedding rhythmic animal motion. The surfaces are fuller now, but remain oriented towards the writing of rhythm against time. The animals are not repetitions nor syntheses, but movements, merging with the patterns enveloping them in unfixed and unstable ways. Freedom is here deeply embedded into the illiterate immediacy of rhythm beyond time. On animal statues as well, patterns repeat in cycles, indicating not ‘decoration’, but gesturing to the animals’ life-cycles. At the end of the ‘Dark Ages’, in the ninth century, free spaces return to surround the animals roaming free. Now patterns and animals are both intertwined in dream-like sequences, a final grasp of immediacy before time violently returns²⁶. These people may not have been free altogether from the yoke of time, as our stone age ancestors may have been. But in their pottery, they gestured towards a break from the linearity of conceptual linearity. Their art can thus show us one of the ways towards the marvel of unfolding beyond time.

We can take up their example in developing a different way of writing. As linear concepts write linear time into the world, so a simultaneous writing can pave the way for us to think against time.

²⁵ Tamarix Project, “Ritual, Ceremony, and Living Wild and Free,” in *Oak Journal* no. 4 (Spring 2022), 46.

²⁶ Each of these vases is illustrated and described in John Boardman, *Greek Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1964), 24-35. Needless to say, their interpretation is entirely my own.

and time-keepers of Egypt – and returned to Greece with conceptual thought²⁰. Likewise, the Greeks ascribe their acquisition of astronomy – celestial time-keeping – to the Babylonian magicians and mantics, the Chaldeans²¹.

Thus an age without conventionally written records for trade, law, or literature lies between Mycenaean and Archaic Greece, an epoch where cycles existed – rhythm existed – but not time. Such a transition from Mycenaean checkbooks to a forgetting of writing and time provides us with an excellent resource for thinking against time. Once writing was forgotten, biological rhythms reigned supreme. Archaeological evidence has been uncovered primarily of so-called geometric pottery, vases and shards painted with rhythmic imagery offering “a flexible, essentializing quality by which a viewer could associate him or herself with an idealized image, a broadly sketched social type”²². Social types of the Greek Dark Ages were not without rigidity, of course. But they remained open and adaptable, aligned along the patterns of myths and both narrated and felt in rhythmic ways (the quest, the initiation rite, the genealogy)²³. Time is in such contexts neither linear nor abstract, but lived in ebbs and flows of intensity. Initiation rites in particular “are not always or even usually a single dramatic event;” instead “they more commonly appear as a continuous process of social norming punctuated by small events: a haircut, pilgrimage, athletic contest, or musical performance”²⁴. Alienating abstraction has not, to be sure, entirely disappeared in Dark Age Greece. But it lost the iron grip of writing. As Tamarix have pointed out, such ceremonies

²⁰ Thales P3 in Andre Laks and Glenn Most (eds.), *Early Greek Philosophy* vol. II (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 213.

²¹ Diogenes Laertios, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, I.6.

²² Susan Langdon, *Art and Identity in Dark Age Greece* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 82.

²³ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

In each case, this entails that presence is mixed with absence. Visible surfaces imply depths that are not (immediately) visible, angles of light that change arrangements and dispel mirages. Warmth forms air currents as it dissipates bouncing off walls. Touching this surface means not touching that surface. Smelling exhaust fumes means not smelling the flowers. Intuitive, full presence in lived space is presence layered with absence: “Distantiation alters with convergence, absence with presence, concealment with revelation, reality with appearance”¹⁰.

This remains the case even when – especially when – the synaesthetic character of this notion of presence is stressed. What is not visible can nonetheless be smelled. What is not warm can nonetheless be touched, and in different ways too: my feet touch the grass as my hand clasps this stone or this paper. Where the pulse of my heartbeat doesn’t reach can nonetheless be warmed by my breath. Both are refracted as they join the rhythms of the world bouncing off the grass and mixing with the wind. What I don’t smell can be heard. The layering of presence envelops absence and renders it part of its fuller unity.

Yet this is where time bleeds through. With the layering of presence and absence in Lefebvre’s notion of intuitive presence, each perception is surrounded by “a whole horizon of nonactive and yet confuncting manners of appearance and syntheses of validity”¹¹. Time bleeds back through the cracks of the implicit temporality of the above description. What is not visible now can be smelled now. What is not warm now can be touched now. Where the pulse of my heartbeat now does not reach can be warmed by my breath now. What I don’t smell now can be heard now. All of these synaesthetic experiences

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 211.

¹¹ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 159.

are bound within a synthesis whose validity (say, as the ‘waking world’ in distinction from a dream) is based on the form of the present. Presence is present now, absence is present now, their synaesthetic layering is established now.

What is more, the form of the present which bleeds into presence here is based on the same series of protentions and retentions discussed earlier for the world of pens and desks. What is not visible now was visible earlier and will be visible later, which is why it can be smelled now although it did not smell earlier or won’t smell later. What I don’t touch now and what can be heard now I may have touched earlier or will touch later and cannot be heard later or was not heard earlier. Lefebvre’s deeper, fuller notion of intuitive presence comes in the form of the present, too, alongside the form of the past and that of the future, i.e., retention and protention.

2) The line of time

But surely, I object again, this means that something is wrong with the concept of full and intuitive presence used above, not with my intuition. I wasn’t talking about my body as a point which emanates space around it. Rather, I refer to presence as an ongoing unfolding of what is right in front of me, what surrounds and envelops me. The marvel of presence is for me an ongoing sensation, a “continuous perception” of “straightforward certainty of immediate presence”¹². Rather than a play of presence and absence at some point in time, presence refers to an immediacy unfolding in continuity.

How would such continuity be established? What is it that is continuous, and continuously certain, in its immediate presence? This cannot be each individual sensation – touch, smell, sight – as these are irreducibly punctured by absence. That is, they begin and end at points in time: sound emerges and van-

¹² Ibid, 161.

first Dynasty represents a specific system for recording regnal years”¹⁷. Linear time is imposed in linear record-keeping. As early as Predynastic Egypt, royal iconography was ordered in registers¹⁸. Thus each written composition was ordered into “a series of horizontal compartments or strips into which scenes were divided”¹⁹. Linear Hieroglyphs marked the linear passage of regal years right from the start, overriding the cyclical lives of the plants, animals and humans who became subjects of the Egyptian king. Their proximity to the rhythms of the Nile’s ebbs and floods and the rhythms of the animals and stars came to be overwritten by the linear progression of kings and dynasties, the accumulation of grain and spoils from warfare, and the progress of building pyramids. From there, linear writing and linear time spread to Phoenician, Greek, and Roman linearity – and thus to our own impoverished world where trees are syntheses of leaf-sights with bark-smells in linear protention and retention.

By contrast, wherever linear record-keeping disappears or loses its sway over the population, so does time. On striking example are the Greek ‘Dark Ages’, 1200 to 800 BC, situated between two literate periods with time, but itself without written records in the conventional sense and without time. Prior to the ‘Dark Ages’, Mycenaean palaces recorded their trade and economics on linear tablets, dated and sealed. Yet all this was forgotten in the Bronze Age collapse, and by the time archaic Greece emerged from its ‘Dark Ages’ between 800 and 500 BC, writing and time needed to be re-imposed from elsewhere. Thus Thales, whom Aristotle identifies as the first philosopher, “spent some time with the priests” – that is, with the record-

¹⁷ Kathryn A. Bard, “The Emergence of the Egyptian State (c. 3200-2686 BC),” in Ian Shaw (ed.), *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 75.

¹⁸ That is, by about 3100 BC. See Toby Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt* (London: Routledge, 1999), 31.

¹⁹ Ibid, 373.

of the tree and are not to be synthesized with the images of leaves and bark and the smells of bark and leaves.

These syntheses along conceptual lines are time: the linear synthesis of bark-image and leaf-image, leaf-smell and bark-smell, and the exclusion of blades of grass is the linear writing of a tree (and grass) into the world. Leaf-image was present and is now memory as bark-image is present and bark-smell is anticipated: a line of data points projecting backward and forward; protention and retention along a linear axis. Lefebvre's body, too, moves through time along this linear axis, emanating the tree and blades of grass in the form of a depth which is an arrangement of presences and absences around a conceptual core. And so each tree and each blade of grass, and each stone and bird and human being, too, come to be arranged along an axis of repeated instances of their concepts. Each of them becomes interchangeable; trees to units of lumber, humans to units of labor-power. "It makes it a lot easier to turn everything alive into something dead, to turn forests and people into resources and capital, if you believe everything is dead in the first place"¹⁵.

Thinking against time is thus writing against the concept which writes linear repetitions of itself into the world. The line of time is the line of conceptual writing. This means that breaking the line of conceptual writing also breaks the line of time, allowing presence to reemerge without time bleeding through.

History itself, Western written history and its boundaries, bear out this verdict. "The birth of time consciousness is the movement away from the immediacy of the real, into the symbolic"¹⁶. In ancient Egypt, the earliest writing arose in the context of "an annals system" where "the addition of the year sign" to descriptive pictograms on storage jars "by the middle of the

¹⁵ Ran Puri, "Science: Civilization's Ally," in *Uncivilized: The Best of Green Anarchy* (Green Anarchy Press, 2012), 60.

¹⁶ John Zerzan, "The Flight of Abstraction," in *Oak Journal* no. 4 (Spring 2022), 61.

ishes, lines of sight open up and get blocked; angles change, touch loosens, breath dissipates, smell evaporates. What is in continuity, therefore, are not individual sensations – however intuitive. Nor is it the act of layering them, however ongoing I might strive to make it. For this act is the process of arranging presences and absences in the now-familiar form of protentions and retentions. I see this surface now because I don't see that surface now, but I can arrange them around one focal point because I have seen that surface earlier and know it complements this one. I touch that part now because I don't touch this part now, but I can arrange them around one focal point because I will touch this part momentarily and know it complements that one. I hear this sound now and no longer smell that smell from earlier, so I know that this sound can be arranged around the present focal point and that smell must be from another one. Protention and retention arrange the layers of synaesthetic synthesis, exchanging presence for absence and absence for presence, which is to say, presence now for absence now and absence now for presence earlier and presence now for absence later. The form of the present governs this arrangement of absences and presences.

Yet this layering is not without an anchor providing continuity. Synaesthetic syntheses require a focal point: the 'what' of the sentence 'what is not visible now will be visible later' and 'what I smell now can be touched later'. This focal point, once we've established what it is, might still allow me to think against time.

What remains in immediate certainty once the interplay of presence and absence, and thus the bleedthrough of time, is removed? In other words: what remains of a thing – tree, stone, bird, plant – if I abstract from all sensations? What remains of a tree if I abstract from its color, smell, touch, the way it sways in the wind, its bark and stems and roots and leaves?

Intuitively, I might say: what remains are my memory of the tree and my idea of the tree. But its memory is either a

memory of its sensations, which I am removing from consideration here because time bleeds through them, or a memory of my idea of it. So what remains is the idea of the tree, stone, desk, or bird. But what does this idea consist of? I might say that it's roots and a stem and bark and branches and leaves, arranged to make a crown swaying in the wind – but isn't that a description which gets me right back to sense-perceptions, and thus to the arrangement of presence and absence through which time bleeds?

Not quite. The idea of the tree consists in (1) sense-perceptions (brown, green, sway), (2) concepts of the tree's parts (root, stem, leaves), and crucially (3) the arrangement of the first two elements. In other words, the idea of the tree is the concept of the tree which associates the color brown with the concept 'bark' and arranges it in the middle of the tree, making the stem. Again it is the concept of the tree which associates the color green with the concept 'leaves' and arranges it at the top of the tree, making the crown. And so forth. Likewise, the idea of the stone is the concept of the stone, which arranges the sense-perceptions of weight and hardness and smoothness and grey and white and places it next to a blueish surface which is in turn governed by the concept of a river, and so forth. What remains of a thing when we abstract from sense-perceptions and their arrangement of presence and absence is precisely this arrangement itself: the concept of the thing telling us how to arrange just these sense-perceptions.

But this is to say: what remains is time itself, manifesting (as) the world of things. For the arrangement of sense-perceptions around a conceptual core is their arrangement around an empty series of pure abstractions – concepts of bark and leaves and rivers abstracted from all sense-perceptions and yet governing the arrangement and appearance of all trees and stones and rivers. This series is a series of repetitions. This tree manifests the concept of the tree, as does that tree, as does

that tree, and thus all three are repetitions of one another, just as this stone is that stone is this third stone. Introducing focal points for continuity introduces the world of time, manifesting Kant's pure conceptual acts of recognition, by which each manifold of sensual perception comes to be arranged by the concept to which it belongs. In such processes of cognition, a world of manifolds comes to be subject to categories such as quantity and quality, subsistence and causality, possibility and necessity¹³. And all of these are not just in time, they are time¹⁴.

Everywhere time returns. But this triumph of time is only seemingly complete. For now that I know what is lurking in the center of synaesthetic synthesis, I can think against time by writing against the way that the concept manifests as time.

3) Presence revisited

The reason why presence manifests in the immediately alienated form of the present, and absence in the forms of protention and retention (and thus in the forms of the present as anticipation and the present as memory) is that concepts arrange them this way. I look at the leaves of the tree now and let my eyes wander downward, retaining the image of the leaves and synthesizing it with the image of the bark according to the concept of the tree which tells me how these two belong together. Likewise I smell the bark now and anticipate to smell the leaves momentarily according to the concept of the tree which tells me how those two sense-perceptions belong together, and moreover how they also form a synaesthetic synthesis with the two sights I previously experienced. I look down, and there are green blades next to the base of the bark – and the concept of the tree tells me that these are not part

¹³ Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, B105-106.

¹⁴ Ibid, B177-179.