

sanja pahoki

*This dreary buddle has no hope of death,
Yet its blind life trails on so low and crass
That every other fate it envieth.1*

In the Vestibule of Hell, Dante encounters beings who have lost their bearings in space. Having never made their mark, stood their ground, or committed to anything in life, the Futile are doomed to rush wildly about on the murky margin between Heaven and Hell, spurned equally by both. Negotiating the Vestibule is a paradoxical – and perilous – task. It resonates with the confusion of the psychotic as expressed by Roger Caillouis: “I know where I am, but I do not feel as though I’m at the spot where I find myself.”² The Futile know they are just inside the gate of Hell, yet are unable to engage the edges of this space with their senses – to see them, to touch them – in order to ascend to Paradise or descend further into the Pit. They cannot cross the threshold because their bodies have not coded it as limit – as something to come up against.

The shadowy figures presently darting across the wall at First Site Gallery appear to image what Dante saw. Their faceless bodies, without eyes to see or ears to hear, with feet and hands dissolving in the gloom, stutter, flicker and twirl as they shuttle backwards and forwards – indiscriminately it seems – across an undifferentiated plain. They evanesce before reaching the edge, or else disappear off it only to reappear and repeat the movements seconds later, as if no territory had been traversed at all. Here too the suffering of the psychotic is invoked: “... space seems to be a devouring force ... [the subject] feels himself becoming space, dark space where things cannot be put.”³

For Lacan, we first get our bearings in space when, as babies, we look into a mirror and come up against the cohesive surface of our own body with which we can begin to engage a world. But this imaginary body is also inscribed with “lines of ‘fragilization’”⁴ – a series of points on the body that bear witness to the vulnerability of this image, and the potential dissolution of our reality. Whatever sustains the image, such as taking risks, falling in love, or surmounting obstacles, appears inevitably to follow these same tremulous lines, like new skin forming over a cut, itself vulnerable to being torn.

For the Futile who situated themselves nowhere in life, “nowhere” itself now infiltrates the holes in their being. The dreadful paradox of literally *being* nowhere is indeed beyond all bearing, ripping the Futile apart and propelling them in all directions at once.

Even in mathematics the line is ‘fragile’, is perceived to have holes: “... there will always be a residue of leftover space, of ... infinitesimal intervals ... Summing up all the points we still do not get the line.”⁵ In “Maths was My Best Subject” it is the statement of death in its finitude, certainty and simplicity, under (and over) scored by solid white lines, that unexpectedly saves the dead from being summed up. There is a dissonance between the numbers and nationalities on the one hand, and the “answer” on the other, which in fact begs questions about those who died, thus revealing the irony of the work and of its confident title.

The shape or outline of the ego is not only erased in madness or death but is modulated by love. It is variously swelled, deflated, made luminous or pallid by a kind of love-transfusion in which libido is channelled towards the other and ideally recouped when reciprocated, or else it is lost. The physical relationship between the text piece “That Woman” and “Stalking the Safety Zone” is suggestive of just such a (potentially fraught) amorous exchange. Its trajectory pointing towards “That Woman”, the incandescent desiring body seems to radiate energy towards her, and to receive it in turn. But it is not clear that the loved one is possessed yet, or still. As utterance “that woman” positions her elsewhere, a third person beyond the dialogue. And yet the image, or memory of her is also there “in” the letters on the wall as soon as they are read. What seems certain is that the desire lines of the amorous other have set their course. The lover looks set to drift, in the mode of Lingis’s orgasmic body “toward a state on the far side of organization and sense”.⁶ Towards the beloved.

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1 Dante. *The Divine Comedy . 1 Hell*, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers, (Penguin, England, 1974), p.86.
2 Caillouis, Roger. “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia.” *October* 31 (Winter), pp.17-32.
3 Ibid.
4 Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrit. A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (Tavistock, London, 1977), pp.4-5.
5 Rucker, Rudy. *Infinity and the Mind: The Science and Philosophy of the Infinite*, (Bantam, New York, 1981), p.88.
6 Lingis, Alphonso. *Libido: The French Existential Theories*, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1985), pp.55-6.

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And to hear with our eyes – no, that must be impossible. But sound inflects for us our sight, and big enough explosions DO make our eyes vibrate. Suddenly forms also sound like something – but is it the same as what they seem. Sound augments but also confuses, when it suggests something that’s refused by the form, but can it refuse existence? If objects are always vibrating and moving despite seeming immobility, and that in seeing we feel weight, can something sound like its not actually there? Is this hissing and farting and fizzling and straining and slumping our ears doubling our eyes? If only all forms could have the sensory conjunction of water. Doubt is a gift. “Convergence” typifies our societies interest in “inter”- things: we love things now that do more than one thing at a time, things that gain ambiguity or perhaps elegance through blending definitions. We want to see something on our phone through which we hear things AND we also want to wear it. So sound IS seen and DEFS have weight after all. Do things have to be flexible to be ephemeral? We like explosions because things definitely cease to exist and that in that moment all of our senses confirm a forms absolute from existence. Perhaps permanence is best guessed at right now and doubted forevermore.

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Objects have consequences, seemingly. They move, atomic, formlessly – when static they are seen. That they vibrate constantly, that they are NOW present, is something we will have to trust the physicists on. They only seem here. Now is their moment of form, but later, who knows? Things SEEM when we recognise our own transience and temporary-ness. We call upon a bevy of senses that forever frustrate us with their limitation, despite our little understanding of what we actually have – is this here? So some forms seem to be telling us to trust our senses – that this world IS as it seems. Their form constantly refines and is refined and refined until in its essentialness it cannot be doubted – it absolutely IS. Is this our eyes? Can we only see it? But light is also a particle, if I remember correctly, so there is some weight to seeing. So to SEEM is also to FEEL, as this light imposes its visual weight upon our skins – we see with every pore of our body.

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