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EXIT Genres

& the Experience of Reading

EXIT-genres are dispositions towards generic life or life-as-we-know-it. They seek to utilise underdeveloped relationships within established generic systems. This includes both personal systems of attention & perception and cultural systems that range from shared interests to radical otherness. To EXIT, one would escape from conventional forms of exchange as well as habitual practices of thought. In this way we may think of EXIT-genres as genres of suggestion: as systems of directed attention. The EXITs themselves must try to escape becoming repertoires of solutions or avoidance as they aid the convergence and connections of intra & extra personal systems. No matter how innovative the unconventional solution is, what was once an EXIT ends up a genre. The aim of EXIT-genres is not to dismantle genres but to focus on what they provide, therefore their value resides in the incessant contributions they make to the practice of person.

"Arakawa & Gins have worked and continue to work in what are often construed as aesthetic discourses because these mediums, in their concreteness, have proved the most effective for exploring fundamental issues that lie outside art and architecture, issues normally regarded as the province of philosophy, psychology and cognitive science." (Haxthausen: 1997, p 35)

EXITs come in two generic sizes: "out & away" and "in & through". The first is the bigger and more well known, "out and away", which attempts to escape by dismantling or transcending the formal systems of genres that set the parameters for meaning, expectation, participation and innovation. This approach is exemplified by the Modernist Will to continually begin again. The second, which is smaller and more subtle, "in & through", seeks escape from the fixity of cognitive frames by using inflection to alter systems internally. "As Kafka has the Ape say in "Report to an Academy", it isn't a well formed vertical movement towards the sky in front of oneself, nor a question of breaking through the roof, but of intensely going head over heels and away no matter where even without moving. It is only a question of a line of escape"
(Deleuze and Guttari: 1986, p6). Decisions about the form of the EXIT involve the appropriative strategies of being a person, decisions about its placement and use involve ontological experiments of being in-person. Because they are living systems, EXIT genres expire. Self-invention cannot live on prefabricated bread alone though templates are the food of contemplation.

In this essay I will use the activity of Reading to discuss different orientations towards Experience, in order to escape the general perception that EXITs come in only one size, "out & away". Current discussions about the architectural body will aid in describing richer and more varied conditions for attention, perception and decision and more subtle approaches to "getting to the next EXIT". Therefore when figuring out systems we should not think in categories but from configurations. Configurations are N-dimensional organisations of form and matter. Because the oscillation of attention makes something now a particle now a wave, successful escapes are no longer assessed on specific qualities alone. For example, the qualities of a table shift with attention to its shape or seating capacity or ease to clean. The nuances of particle-wave states bring us to the threshold of infinity. In the West, when confronted with infinity, we have chosen to remain on the side of the Many versus the side of the infinite undifferentiated One. An EXIT is not an ability, but an EXIT genre is a practice.

For purposes of this exhibition several practitioners have been asked to consider the use of genres in the procession from one self to one self or from one self to an other self. The relation between Experience and Reading draws attention to systems in the practice of person that require complex treatment. The practitioners were invited to think about, as Gins puts it,

"What is missing from the world is a sense of what is in operation as the world", "If each person must invent herself further out of what she has at her disposal, we should at least have readily available a reference guide to all that a person can possibly rally to the cause of being a person... The body-person cannot be studied apart from her surroundings". (Gins: 1997, epigram)
If these surroundings are conventionally perceived and conventionally constructed, then these practitioners will utilise the forms they know best to think about what these forms cannot provide. When Reading we think we are all alone, but in fact the book does not shield us from the surround, it circumscribes the immersion.

Some practitioners have chosen to collaborate. In doing so, they collide with other systems of operations that put into relief one’s own blind spots. Others will collaborate with themselves, roaming around the person-hood. Exit genres provide the equivalent of the ethnographic turn in art and theory on the level of the individual, the community of one organising an auto-curation.

The way in which practitioners utilise all their “reference guides” on a single occasion may be described by Hal Foster’s approach to actuality when he asks “what produces a present as different, and how does a present focus a past in turn? This question involves the relation of critical to historical work, and here no one escapes the present”. He offers two axis useful to our discussion: 1) a vertical, historical axis that may be aligned with a perspectival orientation, forms and forming and 2) a horizontal, social axis that may be aligned with point of view, instance, matter and material. The horizontal social expansion opens other vertical historical dimensions. The revival of canons however holds the danger of also reviving canonical values, ones to which we should not simply surrender. (Foster: 1996, pp xi - xiii). It is because we cannot escape being at the crossroads of the social and historical that the Real returns in the form that each person’s life takes. This exhibition suggests that theory too is a practice that cannot escape the present and is important to exhibit along with other genres as forms of presentation.

In this concern Foster is in accord with Richard Rorty who, at a recent conference on the Humanities in Brisbane, spoke on the failure of analytical philosophy arguing instead for a transformative philosophy. Rorty suggested that the real value of analytic philosophy lay not in its attempts to add bricks to the edifice of knowledge, but in its ability to transform subjectivity. This transformation happens through stories. Its real effect stems not from its verifiable reality but its affective reality. The way in which affect impacts upon rigour and shared interests is summed up by the poet Don Byrd, who states that “we are now responsible for
our feelings the way we were once responsible for our beliefs".  
(Byrd: 1999, manuscript)

What have genres been?  
The last thing anyone wants to hear in a conversation nowadays is someone's worldview. Perhaps at the turn of last century that was all that was appropriate to discuss. In a world after the death of most everything, genres are the conditions of a world made presentable through shared codes of recognition that forge a common ground. Genres are logics where "certain rules produce certain results" (Byrd: 1994 p.19) These certainties occur under isolated conditions, like those of a genre.

"The persistent danger is, that humans confuse themselves with their own mechanisms, with their technologies as well as their bodies and souls, which isolated from each another, are also merely machines." (Byrd: 1994 p.36)

Lines of escape emerge not from isolating the mechanisms but from identifying operations. Perhaps in order to follow the Situationists International out of the 20th century, we will need to reconsider imposed totalising perspectival systems, (which genres once represented), as subjective propositions now available for transformative use (as EXIT genres). To get to this point James Gibson helps to sort out the directions that lines of escape may take and how they operate on a cultural scale. In his work on event perception he offers the distinction between visual field and visual world. The former is detached from the other senses where the eyes fixate to produce dimensional shapes; the latter is the integration of the senses where their interpretation creates the experience of dimensional shape. Vision is normally crossed with other senses but can be artificially separated out, so that cultures might be differentiated according to how the distinguish between visual field and visual world (Jay: 1994, p4).

If we take Rorty's cue and consider everything (all disciplinary and discursive practice) as stories, then this levelling affords greater diversity. The scale would be changed, but the reference guide would be increased, and the line of escape would be broken from party lines free to link with any unclaimed aspects of person. In the last ten years we have seen an increasing uneasiness or crisis in representation. Take for example the genre anxiety (Lumby), or
the creation of new genres such as Mystery (Ulmer) not to mention all the genre jumping, beginning with movies like *Predator* or *Dusk til Dawn*, or internal genres in *Back to the Future* or *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* or *Alley McBeal* or sampling in music, installation and performance in visual arts, and ficto-criticism and creative non-fiction in writing. EXIT genres represents the current relationship between person, genre and world.

It is now important to place genres and EXIT-genres in situ, into complex sample situations. The relationship of Reading to Experience is precisely the situation of person to system. For ultimately, what is at stake is the possibility of an auto-intrusive, micro-beckoning, self-organising system that moves from origin to origin. In order to demonstrate the implications of a complex situation of person, we will take the permutations of Reading and Experience one at a time. First the Reading of Experience, second the Experience of Reading, third the Threshold Between, and fourth the Body Surround.

**The Reading of Experience**

is a notion we are already acquainted with, in that it receives all the exposure and promotion. Reading proposes a conventionalised relationship of transparency between the symbolic order, the faculty of understanding, and events in the world. We accept, partly for convenience, that the symbolic order of language can represent the world and our experience of it to ourselves. We "read" the world as a way of negotiating and managing it. By attending to the correspondence between Language and the world we are able to create understanding of phenomena such as: the road, the river, our partner's expression, etc. This is the flow of information and conforms easily to the acceleration and simulacra of which we have been convinced. The *always already there-ness* of language underwrites the value of Reading because what it lacks in diversity of media it makes up for in proliferation and infinite internal variety. In other words the symbolic order of Reading is a bad infinity: internal to One, versus an infinite number of infinite sets.

An example of the Reading of Experience and its infinite regress is the Claude Glass. The 17th century landscape paintings of Claude Lorraine were so remarkable for their ability to re-create the effects of light that a fashion was started. On daily walks through the countryside you would arrive at a beautiful vista, take out your
Claude glass, a handheld blue mirror, turn your back to the scene and view it through the portable artist’s vision. This is a clear instance of an activity that began, as an inflected perception (the paintings) became a system of reception (the Claude glass). The system is offered as an overlay to organise the Reading and thereby any Experience had from that Reading.

Reading involves so many events of interaction & interference, of processes & perceptions, mechanisms & slippages, separations & synaesthesias, which all contribute to a body-person system. Some events are more readily translated into symbolic systems. Discrepancies between experience of and experience in different media and genres raise questions as to the range of experience that symbolic order can manage to appropriately represent in given situations. A person engaged in several systems at once while attending to each system may need to draw upon other orders in the configuration. For example, driving while daydreaming. I am able to experience and read the dream while I read and experience the road and the handling of the car. Cognitive, perceptual, proprioceptive and emotional responses to each system of events is determined by attention and interest. Whether I “read” or not depends on which regime of body-person claims the activity. Whether I crash or not depends upon an EXIT-genre that allows creative use of formal and material systems involved. Ultimately, a theory of EXIT-genres argues that awareness of the sensation of thought is an influence in our decisions and experience that enriches us with possibilities while we remain safe drivers.

The Experience of Reading
Lyotard’s essay “After the Sublime, the State of Aesthetics” offers a line of reasoning, a line of escape from the Reading of Experience to the Experience of Reading; an embodied model instead of an information model. His treatment of “nuance” and his proposition that words are the material analogue of matter-in-thought supplies an escape from ingrained characterisation of the relation of form to matter. This relationship has become a cultural value where the economy of the symbolic order is preferred to represent diversity of form, content and medium. For example the digitalisation cannot account for investigations in different genres let alone the difference between information in protein based intelligence versus silicon based intelligence.
For the purposes of this inquiry into the Experience of Reading, Lyotard’s essay will be paraphrased and represented through this concern. The violence this entails is at the heart of the Differend. What emerges therefore, is my line of escape more than a representation of Lyotard’s project. To locate where this essay swerves away it is important to follow his essay step by step. He begins with the premise that there has been a disaster suffered in the sublime sentiment. He argues that this disaster is a sign that forms are not relevant to the sublime sentiment, asking “where does matter stand if forms are not there to make it presentable?”

It is the relation of form to matter that concerns this inquiry. Form is defined as thought as an act of giving a figure to matter. Because imagination is the faculty of presentation capable of making both sensation and concepts present to the mind, it is sacrificed, and with it the sublime sensation, in the name of pure reason so that the ethical may take its place within the aesthetic. The ethical corresponds with the social dimension to which Hal Foster refers in The Return of the Real. Lyotard suggests that the announcement of this sacrifice becomes the sublime. “This is consistent with Kant’s notion that the sublime is a sentiment of mind” (versus the beautiful, which is a fit between mind & nature or imagination & understanding). “Nature is exploited by the mind for a purpose that is not nature's. The mind feels only itself and this heralds the end of the aesthetic in the name of the final destination of mind, which is freedom.” The implications of this destination provide freedom at the expense of imagination (and experiences the imagination is no longer free to present).

It is precisely this rub; the relation of the imagination to conceptual schemas of forming matter that allows us to use genres otherwise, as temporary intolerable figurations of shared meaning and interest. EXIT-genres represent an approach to the configuration of forming actions.

To break with the Kantian logic of form’s relation to matter, Lyotard introduces the notion of Nuance. Nuance allow “material” to participate, or better yet, to partake in forming. “Nuance, timbre and tone are approaches to presence without recourse to means of presentation.” At every turn nuance opens up an infinity by paying attention to the qualities of difference. This is precisely what escapes formal determination. For example, the note of C is a formal concept however the note of C on a clarinet or on a trumpet or voiced opens infinite diversity of nuance. Paradoxically
this infinity that opens everywhere makes nuance seem ungraspable, indeterminable and immaterial, since it does not reside in either form or matter and requires that the mind suspends its active determinations. Its formal quality now resides in systems of attention. "The paradox of art after the sublime is that it turns towards a thing which does not turn towards the mind. How can the mind situate itself, get in touch with something that withdraws from every relationship?" (Lyotard 1991, pp135 -143)

Since matter has no need of us it is we who have the need to establish a relationship with it. The loophole in all of this is to find an analogue for matter in thought. Lyotard suggests that words are this analogue: the rub of form and matter in thought. This locates a sensation proper to the activity of thought, which nuance expands in our understanding that different thoughts are literally of different matters. This indeterminable little bit is the difference between the Mind / Body and the body-person.

The impact of nuance on the sublime means that it is now placed as or at the point of production of sensation in the mind, (the Neitzschean turn of the screw). Where the Sublime used to be a once in a lifetime event, being under death and then pulled out from underneath and away, it is now found under, or more exactly, in back of our very nose, in the humming & clicking rub of form and matter in thought. No longer ecstasy it is now numbing white noise. This is the "after" in After the Sublime...

This attention to nuance in the material dimension of thought is the Experience of Reading and joins with the contents of any mode of presentation to become convincing perspectives for the body-person configuration. Because the sensation of thought is near the threshold of imperceptibility and interferes with the content of the thoughts it is not represented in the symbolic order. We therefore tend to ignore it, assigning it the place of noise instead of regarding it as a regime of possible experience. Experience in this setting represents a position of writing and reading rather than a position in writing and reading.

The Threshold Between
Nuance as a system of attention offers a useful differentiation between the Experience of Reading, (which is the opacity of thought aware of the rub of form & matter in the body-person) and the Reading of Experience, (which is the transparency of symbolic
form that separates form and matter into layers of information). What is indicated by this differentiation is that the autonomy of clinical distinctions such as the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real cannot be maintained. The same attention to nuance that turns the axis of the historical and social into N-dimensional Spacetime, would also suggest that these domains have permeable contours. Persons have imaginary relationship with symbolic order and use the symbolic, imaginary and real domains quite differently in their struggle for understanding. “Configuration” allows for the inseparability of things to coexist along side varying degrees of influence. This approach does not contribute to the edifice of knowledge in a way consistent with the perspective of analytic knowledge. “The structure of the world is not the logic of language but the meaning of language”. (Byrd: 1994 p.28) The relationship of the imaginary to the symbolic, which is sacrificed in Lyotard’s sublime, is precisely from where innovation stems; the site where attention re-configures the operation of forming. It is precisely the oscillation within personal systems (radically different configurations of cognitive, perceptual and proprioceptive systems with the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real domains) that topple the coherence of “great” projects.

EXIT-genres are concerned more with the events of configuration than with the standardisation of description. We ignore the consideration that such domains are living systems, and that there is no escape from the present, not even for concepts thought to be a-historical or universal.

Rarely are living systems purely one orientation or the other. The best example of a body–person on the threshold discoursing (running back and forth) between the Reading of Experience and the Experience of Reading, between the romance of total transparency and the intense involvement with emergence is Franz Kamin. In his book Scribble Death he constructs a threshold and names its affect “AUTOKREELIK”.

“AUTOKREELIK is defined as writing about what is being written as it is being written. However since this is being written for the most part, after the fact, it is really a Post AUTOKREELIK or history of what had been written (with the exception of one part). Due to some rather peculiar circumstances, on the other hand, this particular sentence is being written
several years after the completion of the whole manuscript including both the section which had not yet been written at the initial time of this paragraph and the section which gives an account of what happened to the original manuscript after it was finished. Thus the entirety of *Scribble Death V* containing as it does commentary on itself as it is being written, as well as commentary on what will be written, in addition to the that which was not even suspected to be written (which includes this sentence), gives cause to refer to this as a TIME-WARP-AUTOSKREELIK." (Kamin: 1986, p 119)

This might be described sympathetically by someone like Gertrude Stein as chatter to the point of tumour. He is there *in-person* on the threshold forming and sensing, sensing form and forming matter. His concepts have palpable dross attached to them and his words carry the fictive certainty of a world behind them. He is caught? Positionality is crucial here, as Kamin enacts the “never anywhere dwelling” Heidegger associated with curiosity, or the “straying” abject quality of that Kristeva sees at the heart of identity, or the “tarrying” that Zizek attributes to the subject’s use of the negative. All these moving positions describe the threshold of exits within exits, “even without moving” as Kafka’s Ape says. It is here that most of us pace; somewhere between abstractly structured forms of suggestion and concrete species of practice.

**The Body Surround**

From these descriptions of the Reading of Experience, the Experience of Reading and the Threshold it is possible to locate orientations that “operate as the world”.

Perspective systems produce honoured places so that the complicity necessary to make the system work may be demanded. Theories of the sublime and theories of the gaze share this strategy. The sublime makes us come to think we have created what we have only heard (Longinus); while the construction of the gaze makes us believe we are given the illusion of control of a scene we are only observing (Lacan). Both involve a conflation, induced or desired, of the experience of the media for the understanding of the experience (McLuhan). It reflects an ability to extrapolate our position from the fragment to the whole Perspective system, which is not to be confused with the world.
By knowing the system of perspective and its mode of operation, the fix is in. In fact this is one of the complaints that Barbara Clare Freeman, in *The Feminine Sublime*, makes of the Sublime. She suggests the Sublime was always a tradition of appropriation, domestication and domination of the radically other; a relationship which the feminine sublime leaves undetermined, open and unresolvable in relation to the person. (Freeman: 1995, p. 2-4) To EXIT into this possibility would require the suspension of *genres of appropriation*, which we have relied upon to manage the terror of infinity.

In his essay *A. and Pangoemetry*, Lissitsky makes the link between the bodily orientation and conventions of perspectival representation in his discussion of different versions of the camera. 1.) the European camera which uses a convex lens supplies a perspective that is mechanical, cubic and recedes away from the picture plane in a pyramid towards the horizon and 2.) by contrast a Chinese camera that had developed with a concave lens, also objective and mechanical, which produces a world that curves back towards the person and projects in front of the picture plane. Lissitsky suggests we have forgotten the mechanical and systematic nature of the western camera. (diagram 1: A., B., C. see next page)

It was his idea that Suprematism would ignore the demands of conventional perspective systems and extend the visual pyramid to infinity. He invoked the mathematical metaphor of imaginary numbers to propose how Suprematism would accomplish this feat. The indefinite space made possible in front and behind the picture plane utilises the real effects / affects that imaginary or irrational numbers afford to us. His installation and essay of the same name: *Proun: not world vision but world reality* 1920, already begs the question of the anti-aesthetics, and of material considerations of art after philosophy and of thinking bodies in cultured space; all issues currently under debate. (Lissitsky-Kuppers: 1992, pp 352-358)

Looking at the two scenarios mapped out in the diagrams (diagram 2: A., B.), we can see the different relationship of the person to the picture plane. We easily imagine a Western oil painting or an Eastern brush drawing that fit these scenarios. However let’s substitute a TEXT for the picture and examine the position of the body-person in relation to the implied perspective of the text. The
Western scenario begins beyond the horizon and projects onto the screen/page in a perspective that continues onwards to include and envelop the person.

Diagram 1.: A. the picture plane. B. The pyramid of perspective projected forward in space from picture plane & backward towards the horizon. C. Suprematist infinite projection from picture plane

Diagram 2.: Orientation of person-body to perspective system.
A. From Eastern Model, the world originates in person and extends through the page/screen to the horizon.
B. From Western Model, the world originates from beyond the horizon and projects through page/screen to envelop person.
In this situation, the screen of the page is a reflection where our right hand appears across our body diagonally opposite our own. (The perspective of the mirror operates under the same rules but utilises the world behind us as if it were projected from in front of us. Here our right hand is directly opposite but appears as the left hand of the person in the reflection.)

The Eastern scenario begins in the person and extends outward to the screen of the page and projects through it to the surfaces in the world, which it pulls back around the viewer like a bubble of curved space. Here the right hand is directly consistent with our own as if moved forward in space projected in the same orientation we are experiencing without the screen of the page.

The implications of these dispositions of a text are enormous. They are not only fundamentally different positions relative to the world, experience, and direction of action, but they have proprioceptive, perceptual and cognitive ramifications that impact upon Imaginary, Symbolic and Real domains. The relationship of the body-person to the implied source & direction of the text have largely gone unexamined. Like the Copernican revolution, physical position and spatial orientation reaches far into considerations of being in-person.

Further, is it possible to align the orientation of perspectival scenarios and its configuration in-person to dispositions towards certain genres? Certainly such alignments, orientations and dispositions must be applied to each specific instance, however they are useful to begin shifting attention from separated analyses of genres to an integrated & configurational understanding of activities. The ways in which symbolic perspective operate on our proprioceptive relation to world, field and information environment uncovers not an ideology, (which is the story of our relationship), but a systemasticity, (which structures the very ground of our measure). The complexity that nuance opens into the world requires a measure that ignores certain distinctions in order to operate on the smaller scale nuance brings to light. This would involve combing the measure of effects (shared codes) and affects (stories of use-value) into a single continuum: \( \text{\textcopyright Effect} \).

Madeline Gins in her book *Helen Keller or Arakawa*, investigates, develops, enacts and describes relationships and scenarios that Lissitsky only begin to scratch. She extrapolates the kinds of
possible configurations, wondering "might there be an underlying basis for seeing, and, if so, would this be detachable from the actual seeing of things?" (Gins: 1994, p.12) What "operates as the world" becomes life-as-we-know-it, which reflects a certain range and level of abstraction currently in favour. "The body is inextricably linked with architectural surrounds that are activated and that activate it" (Gins: 1997, p. 169). "To what extent does how the body holds itself in relation to the architectural surround correspond with what is thought and felt? (Gins: 1997, p. 173)

I disagree with Lyotard’s assumption that the destination of the mind is freedom and would propose instead that the destination of mind is Experience. "...to live in exile is, after all to escape from history. One’s destiny in exile is personal and cosmic but not world historical" (Byrd: 1994 p.257) In which case “destination” functions affectively, to reinforce the orientation towards certain rules of Experience. It is Reading’s destiny to amplify its own system of “forming” to make it the appropriate strategy for Experience. This is Western Reflective Tradition engaged ongoing negotiations between the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The short history of this relationship in 3 steps: “1) the separation of a thing from the idea of a thing, 2) the separation of the relationship from the ideas of things, and 3) the separation of the idea of systematicity from particular relationships.” (Byrd: 1999) This last phase is the current condition and will shape emerging body-person-surrounds in the years to come.

In summary, Genres still present totalising systems, however the impact they have as totalising representations has shifted to totalising perspective used as Point of View for subjective transformation. The Reading of Experience promotes the continued production of systems and genres of perspectival language. The Experience of Reading emphasises the multivalence of configurations that construct orientations in body-persons. EXIT-genres are the practice convergence. By utilising generic structures otherwise as well as creating EXIT-genres, "all that a person may possibly rally to the cause of being a person" is made available. Systems of attention that are focused upon nuance insure that our "reference guides" do not sit on a shelf but instead, are configured into us as points-of-readiness.

Jondi Keane, October 1999
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