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Citation:

Bamford, K (2022) "Uncertain? For Sure. Limping? Certainly: Limp Thoughts on Performance Practice, Kiff Bamford." In: Bamford, K and Grebowicz, M, (eds.) Lyotard and Critical Practice. Bloomsbury, London & New York, pp. 205-215. ISBN 9781350192027, 1350192023

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Document Version:

Book Section (Accepted Version)

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## Uncertain? For sure. Limping? Certainly: Limp Thoughts on Performance Practice

Kiff Bamford

Restricted blood flow to the limbs results in claudication.<sup>1</sup> Claudication makes one limp. Such limping is used by Lyotard, both as a physical manifestation and as a metaphor for thinking without certainty, in the two texts, “Apathy in Theory” and “Interview with *Art Présent*,” presented in this volume for the first time in English translation. They don’t present a theory of “limping” but encourage rather a multiplicity of theories which trade on the inherent excitement of the unknown, the as yet undetermined. This is the same “manner” which appealed to Lyotard in Kant’s third *Critique*; the same wandering attention that appealed in Freud and an openness to the sometimes uncertain encounters in art practice. In this chapter these themes from the two “new” texts will be drawn out through specific examples of performance art practice, their dissemination and attempts at a limping commentary. The vibration of inner organs fired by a sound installation, the smell of recently cut marine ply, the odd encounter of Lyotard with Augustine of Hippo via cassette recorders which should be obsolete, lay bare the body’s limits.

“Apathy in Theory” was first published in the journal *Critique* in January 1975 and subsequently included as the first chapter of the 1977 collection *Rudiments païens* (Pagan Rudiments). This process of publishing articles then incorporating them into subsequent works was commonplace for Lyotard—even the virulent *Libidinal Economy* absorbed a review of *La Vie sexuelle dans la Chine ancienne* (*Sexual Life in Ancient China*) by Robert van Gulik, also published previously in *Critique*. Such fragmentary beginnings mirror the present fate of *Rudiments païens*, having never been published in its entirety in English. Pagan rudiments were soon occluded by the shiny postmodern and the debates that raced off elsewhere, largely away from politics. Yet our publication of “Apathy in Theory” finally completes the set: all elements of the volume now exist in English translation, though they make a motley crew dispersed across five different publications and seemingly isolated from one another. The lack of desire to maintain the collection in English is no surprise given the range of figures and topics dealt with by Lyotard. It would certainly challenge an editor to conjure a guiding thread through the proper names of Blaise Pascal; Louis Marin; Ernst Bloch and Michel Butor, and the themed chapters on the struggle of women, minorities, revolutionary theater, and the

hesitancy of Freud's writing in the chapter translated here. Yet it is a similar diversity across different fields which motivates this present collection and its participants, to argue for and to explore a decompartmentalization of study and a reexploration of Lyotard's potential for critical practice.

The pagan is taken as a figure for Lyotard because of its multiplicity; not the worship of a single all-powerful deity but the commonplace pagan gods who dwelt alongside everyday activities: even the acts of coitus or pissing was attended by a god, a goddess, or several gods, Lyotard recalls.<sup>2</sup> In this pagan multiplicity the grand other of theory is dissembled and the presumption of an all-seeing, all-embracing "master" is brought down. The gendering is significant: as Lyotard asks in the opening to the chapter "*Féminité dans la métalangue*," "It may be that, from the moment you write, you are compelled to be a man."<sup>3</sup> This opening is itself placed under the subheading "*Écriture mâle*" (male writing). It is a subheading that is absent in the English translation, as is the subtlety implied in the chapter's title, given in English as "One of the Things at Stake in Women's Struggles," a left-over from its first publication in Italian. The essay has been one of the more frequently referenced elements from *Rudiments païens*, being also a key touchstone for contributors to the 2007 collection *Gender after Lyotard*. However, the given English title implies that this is Lyotard preaching "on" women's struggles and therefore risks ignoring the nuanced discussions of what a feminine writing might be, discussions which were never fully developed or answered directly by Lyotard but which return at least in the penultimate remark of the Gertrude Stein notice in *The Differend*: "Feminine writing': inscribe that this cannot be filled in, from one sentence to the next? Would it be a genre?"<sup>4</sup> The "this" to which the sentence refers is characteristically left unclear, unfilled: refusing to give pre-prepared answers to the reader.

Paganism also infers the roman *pagus* which signifies the physical and legal border zone, where dwellers are not members of the *polis*, not citizens with full rights: foreigners, slaves, women, children. Lyotard also uses the Greek equivalent *météque* as indicative of the pejorative label given to those from elsewhere in xenophobic French slang. "Greasy foreigner" is the translation used in the 1975 work of "fiction theory" *Pacific Wall*, written in the context of southern California where white skin is seen as a signifier of "blankness" or unquestioned belonging among the pungent eucalyptus trees in the utopian campus of the University of California at San Diego. Ashley Woodward has recently reconsidered *Pacific Wall* in the context of a postcolonial libidinal economy, indicating how Lyotard's writings consider the subtle distinctions of an impiety that does not acquiesce to the imperial dominance which thrives on the blankness of acceptance and political quietude.<sup>5</sup> As Achille Mbembe declares in *Necropolitics*: "Every gesture of writing is intended to engage a force, or even a *diffférend*."<sup>6</sup>

"Apathy in Theory" details an aligned struggle: a struggle with thoughts that refuse to sit within the accepted notions of knowledge, that sit without the *polis* of what should be thought. This rudimentary aspect of paganism is complex and self-contradictory, following the twists and turns of impious thoughts which provoke and demand judgment, whilst refusing to supply a ready guide. Instead, the role of affect is introduced. Introduced, not as a guide to judgment but as the signal of a demand, the

presence of something that requires judgment without prejudgments. Affect, present not only in psychoanalytic theory or more specifically the writings of Freud, but in art practice, practices that are taken up as the subject of the *Art Présent* interview and which link to the questions taken up again in the exciting late essay “The Affect-phrase.”

### Incertitude

For Lyotard there is a particular moment discernible in Freud’s work that correlates to the manner of working he describes as apathetic. It is a mode of writing and thinking which allows lines of thought to be followed regardless of the need and pressures to prove according to usual conventions, through demonstrable evidential claims. Rather, it is a mode based on an affective instinctual “hunch” which, because it is uncertain in its very method, cannot subscribe to accepted conventions of thinking. Lyotard suggests that such an approach occurs in the work of Freud at the time of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* because of the uncertain nature of the drives about which he is speculating: the proposal of a “third” regime of the drives characterized not as oppositional to one another but as aligned, correlated, inter-related. The uncertainty inherent in the drive dualism and its dissimulating effects parallels the “hesitation in the discourse of knowledge”<sup>77</sup> when confronted by this indeterminacy, or to put it otherwise the proposals do not lend themselves to the established characteristics of thinking that Lyotard lampoons under the nomination of the theoretical.

Theoretical terror is Lyotard’s target in “Apathy in Theory,” thus reminding us of the context of its writing. It came in the wake of *Libidinal Economy* (1974) which had drawn the ire of many readers for its ethical indeterminacy, for its parodic approach to Marxist theory, for its scandalously untheoretical style: Lyotard would later denounce it as “my evil book.” In some ways we could argue that the presence of this essay in *Rudiments païens*, lightly adapted from its first presentation in the journal *Critique* in 1975, puts paid to the simplistic compartmentalization of Lyotard’s writing as having an identifiable before and after the so-called libidinal period. For is this essay not echoing the challenge of *Libidinal Economy* and with it the highly charged writing style which strikes a chord with aficionados of Deleuze and Guattari? The section of “Apathy in Theory” titled *Advocatus Diaboli* (Devil’s Advocate) shows Lyotard at work in the process of retranslating Freud (hence the multiple explanatory translator’s notes,) whilst acting also as the nominated contestant, or witness to Freud’s own “critical reflection [*Besinnung*: reverting to the sense].”<sup>78</sup> As a popular title given to the adversary in the Roman Catholic process of assessing candidature for canonization, the *Advocatus Diaboli* seeks to undermine and challenge. The refusal to accept the claims of a dominant genre, even and especially within the same voice, emerges within the pagan work and demonstrates a bridge to both *The Postmodern Condition* and *The Differend*. In the pagan work the triad of addressor, addressee and reference, are used as the basis for a pragmatic analysis of the relation between nodes and modes of address whilst in *The Differend* the pole of referent is further subdivided into sense and referent: four instances to ascertain how claims are established, dismissed and silenced. Investigating the operational modes that form the basis for a discourse weighted to an already

established schema, which gives voice to some whilst silencing others, is already very present in Lyotard's work on paganism. So too is the refusal to accept the "intimidation" to remain silent about that which does not conform to the prescription of truth accepted by the dominant theoretical genre, as dictated by the dominant *Imperium*.<sup>9</sup>

The possibility of a connection between the most stylistically outrageous of Lyotard's books—*Libidinal Economy*—and his seemingly most restrained—*The Differend*—is significant. It forces us to undermine the assumption that we should or could simply take Lyotard's own word for the moves he makes; how we should judge what has been published and what should be disregarded, passed on or passed over. Often he reflects the attitude of many artists whose concern is only for their current work, consequently resisting attempts by a curator, interviewer, or art historian to return them to earlier work in discussion, unless that work is part of the current project. In the art world this fear comes perhaps from the convention of the retrospective which is traditionally both the apogee and death knell of an active practice. The desire of others to turn always to the work which made them established is a refusal of that which engages them now, it dissimulates the new for the already acknowledged. Likewise, when the "evil book" quotation is used to dismiss the *Libidinal Economy* (spoken over a decade after its publication): "I used to say that it was my evil book, the book of evilness that everyone writing and thinking is tempted to do,"<sup>10</sup> we might counter such an easy refutation with another, similar quotation (also spoken over a decade since its publication) about *The Differend*: "which is a terrible book, a horrible book."<sup>11</sup> In the light of "Apathy in Theory" we should be more cautious about both these declarations—they are not simple dismissals within the context of success or failure but rather express the need to pursue the new and to play with the discourse of knowledge in order to destabilize that which he terms theoretical terror. For if Lyotard was to agree that one or other of these books was his "master" work it would suggest he had succeeded, arrived, and through such arrogance stymie the wandering trails of thought. When he did come close to self-aggrandizement in declaring *The Differend* his "book of philosophy" it was firmly tongue in cheek. The declaration itself is a parody—"my book of philosophy"—which prompted protestations from Jacques Derrida that he was not perhaps the best judge: exactly!<sup>12</sup> Marcel Duchamp made a similar point, concretized through a self-portrait *With my tongue in my cheek* (1959) which incorporates a cast of his cheek pushed out by the tongue hidden inside, benefiting also from an additional pun in French where *la langue* conveys both tongue and language. With one's tongue in one's cheek, however, speech is impeded. As Lyotard declares in the *Art Présent* interview: with Duchamp there are only paradoxes, it is his task to multiply paradoxes and "to defy all commentary." "All the wordplay, all the puns, all the linguistic research, it's the same thing. They are linguistic paradoxes."<sup>13</sup>

Parody is the strategy offered by Lyotard at the end of "Apathy in Theory" to overturn the theoretical as the dominant genre of discourse. Within this context there is another self-referential remark worth revisiting, to demonstrate the extent to which Lyotard can be said to have pursued his own exhortation to destroy theory by rendering it one genre among others, to lay bare its limitations through fiction-theories. When interviewed by the artist and concrete poet Alain Arias-Misson for the art and poetry journal *Lotta Poetica* in 1987 Lyotard explains the context for the commissioning of

*The Postmodern Condition*. Following the insistence of the director of the Council of Universities of the government of Quebec to write a report on the “problems of knowledge in industrially developed societies” Lyotard was made to consider the possibilities of exploring the report as a genre. It was not without interesting precedents, Lyotard reflects, citing *The Georgics* by Claude Simon for its fragmentary use of historical reports within a multivocal fictional context.

So I said, all right, something could be done in report style, why not, it’s interesting, brief. Like a communiqué, so I’ll try to write on this question of the changing state of knowledge. I told stories in the book, I referred to a quantity of books I’d never read, apparently it impressed people, it’s all a bit of a parody.<sup>14</sup>

This confession is used by Perry Anderson in *The Origins of the Postmodern* to cast aspersions on the false crowning of *The Postmodern Condition* as a bible to the postmodern while at the same time making the nuanced observation that this was already undertaken in Fredric Jameson’s introduction to the English translation, which destroyed it from within.<sup>15</sup> Yes, the footnotes proliferate as with all “weighty” tomes and is all the more marked in contrast to the svelte appearance of *The Differend*, then in preparation, which was published without footnotes. In the Lyotard archive I read correspondence from an American friend explaining, with regret, the poor reception of an article solicited from Lyotard for a US journal—without the required number of footnotes it apparently doesn’t deserve a proper reading. This is Lyotard’s point, and one from which we might still learn. In his 2018 book *New Dark Age* the artist James Bridle recounts the increased percentage of scientific journal articles that are retracted, of which a significant proportion are the result of researcher misconduct, not through deliberate attempts at parody but because of the reliance on automated data collection and pressure to publish that has resulted in a seemingly exponential rise in articles themselves, thus rendering the peer review process invalid.<sup>16</sup> The destruction of theory for which Lyotard calls is an undermining of the presumptions to truth which might shelter mere axiomatic assumptions. In the *Art présent* interview the rhetorical call to destroy theory is qualified: not to destroy like a terrorist but to multiply theories, to dissemble its claims to dominance. It is a challenge echoed in Donna Haraway’s embrace of “speculative fabulation,” not to abandon facts but to show there must be other ways of thinking besides the constraints of accepted narratives: “It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with.”<sup>17</sup>

For Lyotard theoretical terror is the dominance of a model that constrains, whether the dominant model of Western philosophy from Plato to Jacques Lacan, or the unachievable ideals of Karl Marx, especially when strangled by bureaucracy as exemplified by the French Communist Party. The theoretical is the realm of the unattainable idealized objects paraded outside the cave’s opening to which Plato emboldened his student to cleave, neglecting the “imitations” of the everyday which included their own bodies, desires and passions. A revocation of all passions except that of conviction: true over false, good over bad, or the ultimate resolution of revolution above all else. When Lyotard proclaims his adoption of a “degree zero”

approach to language in *The Differend* he parodies the abstracted search for neutrality of so-called “ordinary language” philosophers who take inspiration from the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*. In “Apathy in Theory” Lyotard quotes Wittgenstein’s call to silence as that which Freud refused in his speculative writings, dismissing the limitations of the unsayable and the terror of silence.<sup>18</sup> Where then does the parody end for Lyotard, does it have any seriousness? Yes, of course in that the “serious” is the playful rearticulation of possibilities for thought. The playful model he identifies in the wanderings of the Freud text he follows with care and in the artistic tendency not to shoulder the weight of the world’s woes on one’s shoulder but to experiment regardless of the pressure to prove, to make useful, to monetize or, in the words of the present UK government, to pursue a “high-value” course of study. This is the apathy that Lyotard exhorts us to and its potentially misleading usage needs some clarification.

“This wanderer is apathetic” because they do not know, they are not certain and are not turned or tuned to the conventions of theoretical discourse: they do not seek to be convinced. Conviction closes enquiry, it requires and follows a set of logical moves internal to its system (what Lyotard later calls “phrase regimens”) in order to achieve the desired (and predictable) outcome. What Freud does not do—as the wanderer, writing *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—is dismiss the effects of uncertainty: the writing does not signal Freud’s conviction regarding the workings of the drives but indicates “at least its *existence* as a theoretical hypothesis subject to discussion.”<sup>19</sup> This is in spite of Freud’s acknowledgment that he is not convinced, that he cannot believe it: contravening as it does the basis of knowledge production as reliant on the “decidability of causes.”<sup>20</sup> Through the analysis of Freud’s hesitation within the text Lyotard jumps on the decisive presence of undecidability within his thinking: his desire to ascertain the absence of determinacy. Lyotard concludes that what Freud experiences is in fact not a lack of conviction but the undecidability of affect, a common function inherent to the drives which are his concern. Rather than being founded on the opposition of life / death; need / desire; pain / pleasure as posited in the previous theory of the drives, Freud finds the symptoms of the cases he follows to be indiscernible from one another. The drives themselves operate in the same manner: without stable guiding principles. Lyotard leads us to Freud’s account of the case of Dora. Her multiple physical, bodily symptoms are seen as pronouncements that are rendered undecidable because they are blocked together, signifying not life or death but life and death, whether the life of the symptom or the threatened death of the organic body. The respiratory system signifies that it is being killed at one and the same time that the symptom declares that it lives.

### Opening Uncertainty

Thank you.

Thank you for watching that with me.

Thank you for watching the screen filled with a mouth trying to keep open.

Struggling to stay open, “to stay open for you;” verbalizing the simultaneous physical struggle of the programmed conceit.

It is 2017 in the cinema of the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) off the Mall in London. Outside there is a protest to “save our NHS.” Inside we have just watched a visual display of the state of dentistry in the United States circa 1974, courtesy of the performance artist Vito Acconci and his ten-minute video *Open Book*.<sup>21</sup> Projected on the cinema screen rather than presented on a monitor, this work is transformed from a strange, intimate gesture into something more macabre. The soundtrack is rendered literally cinematic, the protagonist’s—the artist’s—voice inescapable as its pleading becomes more threatening: “I stay open for you!” How can he remain open for us? What might that mean? Of course it is metaphorical as well as literal but what does it mean, this opening of which the mouth speaks? I am reminded of this challenge when reading Lyotard’s interview for *Art Présent* where he draws on Beckett’s *Watt* and the strange description of his movements. But I didn’t know the interview then: it hadn’t found me, though I wanted to remain open to allow it to limp to me stuck in a bound cycle of repetition.

The symposium I have begun to describe was entitled *Performance and Uncertainty*, co-programmed with artist and colleague Harold Offeh at two venues in Leeds and London. *Open Book* was shown at both iterations. Working together because of our shared interest in reperformance, repetition, the *re-* of performance, it was initially our intention that the idea of reperformance would be our theme, but it felt too staid, ground already well-trodden. Uncertainty was proposed instead, proposed by chance on the same day that news came through of the fatal assault on a Member of Parliament in the north of England, not far from my home; the brutal assault on a young, optimistic, MP whilst walking in public in her constituency. We were eating noodles, Harold and I, when the news came through. A couple of hours before our planning meeting at the ICA.

Uncertainty became the moniker that accompanied the aftermath both of the murder and the result of the Brexit campaign which had likely contributed to her death, accompanied as it was by the words “Britain First.” In Brazil, in the same summer of 2016, the Sao Paulo Biennale was accompanied by a declaration of uncertainty, following the removal of the president and the political ramifications which have continued to play out as a result over subsequent years. Yet the curators issued a statement which encapsulated the positive need to ensure that uncertainty was not a cloak of fear which would simply allow conservative retrograde politics to flourish but, rather, that uncertainty of thought is necessary.

The destabilization of thought fixed within known parameters is what concerns Lyotard in his essays presented here; the theory against which he rails is that which responds only to the yes and no of conviction. The Apathy in theory of which he writes is not indifference in the sense of political quietude, of political indifference, but rather the indifference to those affects of conviction operating within theory that enable a binary response of true or false, yes or no. It is this refusal of bivalence that is termed “apathy.” An apathy toward the one passion—conviction—which the theoretical understands; apathy refuses to be blinded by conviction in order to remain open to complexity. The promised “I can stay open” of Acconci’s mouth similarly draws on this apathy—we do not know how to react—we are rendered uncertain. This menacing, pleading voice. The husky Italian-American accent, well known to those who have encountered Vito Hannibal Acconci in any spoken form. This same voice whose live



presence was removed through death, in the same year as the symposia. As I declared in the presentation that followed the screening of *Open Book*, I was unsure what I was doing. And this was not a conceit. For me “Apathy in Theory” and its accompanying interview begin to echo some of what had led me to that point and now, after the event, I can perhaps uncover some of the feelings which drove them.

### Limping

The interview with *Art Présent* was published in Spring 1979, the same year as *The Postmodern Condition*, the work which would significantly alter Lyotard’s reception and reputation. However, the interview itself predates this: dated Late 1978 it opens with a quotation from “Apathy in Theory” and ends with another quotation from the same collection—*Rudiments païens*—in a joyful leap of continuity. The interview has been hidden not only from English-speaking eyes, this being its first English translation, but also to some extent from the French it would seem. It was published in a small-circulation art magazine which ceased to exist after only nine issues; the interview between Lyotard and Alain Pomarède, its editor, was in the penultimate issue. It has not escaped the attention of scholars seeking to recognize Lyotard’s limited but important writings on cinema, however, for this interview revolves round experimental cinema. It is seen as one of the remedies to the vulgarity he writes of in “Apathy in Theory,” the vulgarity to pretend to speak the truth through that theoretical mode of mastery, to continually venerate the theoretical genre above others. In contrast Lyotard turns to the forces of lightness in “painting, music, experimental cinema as well, obviously, as those of the sciences”: a lightness he takes up limping . . .<sup>22</sup>

‘Was man nicht erfliegen kann, muss man erhincken . . . Die Schrift sagt, es ist keine Sünde zu hinken’ (What we cannot reach flying we must reach limping . . . The book tells us that limping is no sin.)

Freud chose to close *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* with this quotation, the last line of Friedrich Rückert’s “*Die beiden Gulden*” (The Two Coins); a version of one of the short stories—*maqāmah*—of Al-Hariri, the Arab poet also known as Al-Hariri of Basra (1054–1122). The Arabic *maqāmah*, combines rhymed prose (*saj*) and poetry echoing the name of the form, literally settings or assemblies, and the gatherings at which they were traditionally delivered. The lines incorporate rhetorical flourishes, wordplay and other such complexities, while the narrator of the *maqāmah* recounts the stories of a wanderer, their encounters and exploits, with both comic and serious—ethical and religious—content. The first phrase of this quotation was also used as the title to Lyotard’s interview when reprinted in German, in 1986.<sup>23</sup>

### Claudication

“The Old Blind School” is an empty series of adjoining buildings appropriated for use as a temporary exhibition space. Formerly the home of a Trade Union’s social support

center there are faded, peeling murals in some communal spaces: the interior surface of a cupola pictures a glorious socialist future. Downstairs, a warren of installations with no attempt to render the spaces gallery-like. The concrete floor is dusty or partially covered in worn linoleum tiles, one's feet scuffs against the edge, the lip of the lino or the raised surface of residual rubber adhesive. Several hours spent moving between the labyrinth of rooms on the ground floor, the first floor, across linking corridors between the buildings. Brick, early twentieth-century school architecture. Following the exhibition plan to explore every corridor, room, stairwell; second floor: projections, very few visitors now and cut off from the daily life of the city outside. I am tired and, glancing at my watch, mount the stairs to the additional room in the attic, a small room according to the plan which represents it as an extension beyond the drawn projection of the building's footprint. I emerge to find a room within a room and the smell of freshly cut marine ply. Crossing the threshold I am hit by a wall of enveloping sound; red LED display-readers punch out words scrolling from left to right: pausing, flashing. A central, large bass speaker makes the whole structure vibrate whilst hidden speakers bring additional, distanced sounds into the space. The clarity of an intoned voice is interrupted by a cheap horned speaker—invoking political rallies or a mosque's call to prayer—that crackles into life. I remember it as dark, yet there were lights, enough to read the texts provided: booklets of the script I presumed, yet the clearly laid out voices of the text don't match the words that are broadcast, sounds which alternate between single voices and crowds chanting, or overlap to create a cacophony that is felt on the body, through the body as the skin, the organs vibrate to the deep oscillations of the subwoofer. All the time the smell of sawn wood composite—the stuff of temporary installations and shelters. Inside there is one other visitor, I smile weakly but otherwise we ignore one another to face the confusion alone.

Two years later I have read more about the piece.<sup>24</sup> I have read of its evocation of the Shiite festival of Ashura with the breast-beating crowd who reenact the assassination of Imam Al Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Mohammed. I know that the multiple voices narrate not only the events of the story and its theatrical, ritual reenactment but also stranger, more familiar additions—a snippet from Lewis Carroll which feels culturally more familiar yet not straightforward, except for the invocation of judgment in absurdity. I know of the connection to resistance in Lebanon, to the artist's own personal history; the shift from oppressed to oppressor, the role of theater as a means of representation: “is it possible to script justice” asks the artist in an attending publication. Having read about this, but feeling no clearer in relation to the experience I had in the Old Blind School, I contacted the artist to ask if she might contribute to the symposium being planned, now under the title *Performance and Uncertainty*. We arrange a video call. I feel uncertain as to what I am asking but try to convey to the artist Rana Hamadeh the effect that the piece had on me, although it had no clarity, neither in my reaction, attempted analysis, nor retelling. I look away from the eye of the camera to grope for an explanation. I had visited the piece, it had affected me in a way that I couldn't account for but I was sure it offered something that was in keeping with our ambitions for the symposium. “Do you know what I mean?” I ask, hopefully. “No,” she replies, “but I am getting a feeling of what you might mean.”

We agreed that the piece would be incorporated into the symposium at Leeds, not as a sound installation but as a performance through which the visitors would wander.<sup>25</sup> The technical set-up was complex. It is an eight-channel sound play which requires four full-range corner speakers, two full-range middle speakers, two large subwoofers, a horn speaker, a cheap speaker, two microphones, a sound engineer, some lengths of chain, an office plant and a full day of technical set-up and sound checking before the performance. It also required me to sing a song from Lewis Carroll and to hold an interview with the artist as part of the performance. Later, following the first projection of Acconci's *Open Book* and my accompanying remarks, I gave two short readings. In comparison to Rana's sound play they were simple. I read into a microphone then moved around the now-seated audience, still reading: first a section from the *Confessions* of St. Augustine on time, "How can I measure time. . .?" then a section from Lyotard's *The Confession of Augustine*, "Witness," read once straight and then read again but backwards in sections, phrases, which made new, jumbled sense.

By the time of the London event, the reading of *The Confession of Augustine* had become more theatrical. It was a month later to the day with a new program, only the Acconci video and my poor joke about the state of dentistry in the United States remained the same. The audience were in fixed seats and presenters spoke from the small stage of the ICA cinema. This time I read into two microphones, one amplified for the present audience and an old recording microphone attached to a cassette tape recorder. I knelt on the stage, spotlit from below by a single lamp and, before I read, pressed "record" and "play" on the tape recorder:

### Witness

Not memory, then, but the said inner human, who is neither man nor inner, woman and man, an outside inside. This is the only witness of the presence of the Other, of the other of presence, A singular witness, the poem. The inner human does not bear witness to a fact, to a violent event that it would have seen, that it would have heard, tasted, or touched. It does not give testimony, it is the testimony. It is the vision, the scent, the listening, the taste, the contact, each violated and metamorphosed. A wound, an ecchymosis, a scar attests to the fact that a blow has been received, they are its mechanical effect. Signs all the more trustworthy since they do not issue from any intention or any arbitrary inscription: they vouch for the event since they remain after it. Augustine's *Treatises* abound in these analyses of semiotic value: the present object evokes the absent one, in its place.

The inner human does not evoke an absence. It

is not there for the other; it is the Other of the there, who is there, there where light takes place without place, there where sound resounds without duration, and so forth. Explosive and implosive, it is the *plosum*, the plosion cancelling the *a priori* forms of inscription and hence of possible testimony. A witness in proportion to there being none, and there can be no witness of this blow that, we repeat, abolishes the periods, the surfaces of the archive. The tables of memory fall to dust, the blow has not passed. The inner human attests *ab intestat*.<sup>26</sup>

Blinded by the light, I fumbled to press “stop” on the cassette recorder, to feel my way across the buttons to press “rewind,” then to “play” again as the recorded sound of what I had read was replayed, and over which I read the text again but in reverse: single words, grouped words or phrases, to reread the text again; duetting with my own recorded voice. This was rehearsed in part, but never before an audience had I read in this way the odd recreation of Lyotard’s own duet with Augustine, itself a dialogue with his interior self, or with his imagined voice of God.

Gerald L. Burns comments that Lyotard’s own writing in this his last, unfinished, text becomes indecipherable from that of Augustine: the voices of commentary melt into the commented-on and in the fragments of the unfinished text in particular, the two merge.<sup>27</sup> Lyotard notes that Augustine had lifted “whole verses from the psalmists,” together with the use of a meter or rhythm comprised of two unequal parts—the *qinah*, identified in the late nineteenth century through analysis of Hebrew laments—which “move the body in minimal choreographic figures; one limps in jerks so as to deplore the infirmity of being unable to walk straight.”<sup>28</sup> I don’t know the extent to which my body moved on the stage of the ICA but I know that inside I danced, limping because the ground was unclear.

At one moment my recorded and voiced readings met and crossed one another—the point of the wound, the scar: “they vouch for the event since they remain after it”; “since they remain after it, they vouch for the event.” This is what I gained from Rana Hamadeh’s sound play, led by Lyotard’s limping incertitude.

## Notes

- 1 A somewhat unfamiliar medical term, claudication or intermittent claudication causes limping; the reader is asked to put up with the awkward unfamiliarity of this term, to limp on in the knowledge that Lyotard’s metaphorical reference to this medical condition is unrelenting in the interview with *Art Présent*, published in this volume, extending its singular appearance in “Apathy in Theory.” To aid the reader the following note is added to the translated *Art Présent* interview: “Intermittent claudication is a cramping pain that limits walking ability. It may be neurogenic or vascular . . . Claudication most commonly affects the calf muscle.” Michael Kent, *The*

- Oxford Dictionary of Sports Science & Medicine*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 116.
- 2 Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, tr. Iain Hamilton Grant (London and New York: Continuum, [1974] 2004), 6.
  - 3 Jean-François Lyotard, "Feminité dans la métalangue" in *Rudiments païens* (Paris: Klincksieck, [1977] 2011), 145–56. Translated as "One of the Things at Stake in Women's Trouble," by Deborah J. Cherry in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Oxford, UK and Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1989), 111, trans. modified.
  - 4 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, tr. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, [1983] 1988), 68. "L'« écriture féminine »: inscrire que ça ne peut pas être comblé, d'une phrase à l'autre? Serait-ce un genre?" *Le Différend* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1983), 105.
  - 5 Ashley Woodward "White Skin': Lyotard's Sketch of a Postcolonial Libidinal Economy," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, vol. 51, no. 4 (2020): 337–51.
  - 6 Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, tr. Steven Corcoran (Durham NC: Duke University Press, [2016] 2019), 1.
  - 7 Jean-François Lyotard, "Apathy in Theory" in this volume, 146.
  - 8 *Ibid.*, 141.
  - 9 Jean-François Lyotard, "Art Présent Interview" in this volume, 149.
  - 10 Jean-François Lyotard, *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 13.
  - 11 Jean-François Lyotard, "Resisting a Discourse of Mastery: A Conversation with Jean-François Lyotard" with Gary A. Olson, *JAC* 15, no. 3 (1995), 408.
  - 12 "« Mon livre de philosophie » dit-il," Blurb on the back cover of the French edition of *The Differend*; for Derrida's comment see "Philosophy: The case for the defence" [1984], in Kiff Bamford (ed.), *Jean-François Lyotard: The Interviews and Debates* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 67.
  - 13 Lyotard, "Art Présent Interview" in this volume, 157; 156.
  - 14 Jean-François Lyotard, "Interview with Arias-Mission," *Eyeline* (November 1987), 17.
  - 15 Perry Anderson, *The Origins of the Postmodern* (London and New York: Verso, 1998), 25.
  - 16 James Bridle, *New Dark Age* (London and New York: Verso, 2018), 86–93.
  - 17 Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 12. Haraway is paraphrasing the social anthropologist Marilyn Strathern.
  - 18 Lyotard, "Apathy in Theory" in this volume, 149.
  - 19 *Ibid.*, 145.
  - 20 *Ibid.*, 146.
  - 21 Vito Acconci, *Open Book* (1974), Video, 10:09 min, color and sound.
  - 22 "Apathy in Theory" in this volume, 141.
  - 23 Jean-François Lyotard, *Philosophie und Malerei im Zeitalter ihres Experimentierens*, tr. Marianne Karbe (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 1986), 51.
  - 24 Rana Hamadeh, *Can you Pull in an Actor With a Fishhook or Tie Down His Tongue With a Rope?* 2014, installed at The Old Blind School, Liverpool, UK, as part of the exhibition *A Needle Walks into a Haystack* curated by Mai Abu Eldahab and Anthony Huberman, the 8th Liverpool Biennial, July 5–October 4, 2014.

- 25 Rana Hamadeh, *Can you Make a Pet of Him Like a Bird or Put Him on a Leash For your Girls?* 8-channel live sound-play/performance, commissioned and produced by Western Front, Vancouver, 2015. Performed at The Tetley, Leeds, February 4, 2017.
- 26 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Confession of Augustine*, tr. Richard Beardsworth (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, [1998] 2000), 7–8.
- 27 Gerald L. Burns, “The Senses of Augustine,” *Religion & Literature*, vol. 33 no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 1–23.
- 28 Lyotard, *The Confession of Augustine*, 85.