

Jed Rasula

## *Syncope, Cupola, Pulse*

for Nate Mackey's

"cardiognostic need"

"as though song were a leg"

"as though the heart were a ventriloquist"

To *re-make* the mistake. Seize the flaw. Flow.

"The queen of rhythm, syncope, is also the mother of *dissonance*; it is the source, in short, of a harmonious and productive discord. The process allows some limping before the harmony, however: it is sometimes said that syncope 'attacks' the weak beat, like an enzyme, a wildcat, or a virus; and yet the last beat is the saving one- Attack and haven, collision; a fragment of the beat disappears and of this disappearance, rhythm is born" (Catherine Clément).

Obatala (the "unblemished god...the serene womb of chthonic reflections ...a passive strength awaiting and celebrating each act of vicarious restoration of his primordial being" [Soyinka]) leads the deities in soaking up the human broth. In Sanskrit poetics, *rasa* is the savor, the aesthetic presentiment of divine nutrition; art as sublime altruism, from mortals to the immortals—this nudge of flavorful necessity.

A "physics of bliss, the groove, the inscription, the syncope: what is hollowed out, tamped down, or what explodes, detonates." (Barthes)

Speck or scar; striations of the fold, creasing the text.

Stains, blurs, corruptions.

Bracketed dust of Sappho, Archilochus ...

Mistake as revelation.

Interpretations often want to heal the text of some mistake, its *petite mal*, its tiny seizure. Its coughs, sneezes, stutters. Its limp.

Limp: limbp. Legba's legs—one foot in each world, heaven and earth—make a discordant sound when he walks.

Legba's genius: each leg makes its own sound. (Two does not exist: every pair is one + one- "Double consciousness": fed the *verb* in it!—*double time*.)

.(((Polyrhythm)))

Legba: god of gates and doors, fences and boundaries, also patronizes roads and paths; blesses not only the block, but the break. A paradox. Pledging uncanny junctions, spooked transitions of empowerment. (Robert Johnson at the crossroads.) Enabler of agile transgressions. "Legba is the divine linguist." master of a "unique dialectic, the copula in each sentence ... He has sexual relations with any woman he

chooses because these boundaries—physical, social, religious, and even metaphysical—dissolve and reform in his presence” (Robert Pehon)- He's a reformer.

In Haiti, Legba is associated with St. Peter because the saint holds the keys to the kingdom. There (as well as for the Fon of West Africa—and in European alchemical lore\*) Legba's an old man in rags, with a crutch: *pied cassé* or broken-foot.

Oedipus, too (with prophecies said to "flutter about his head" like birds) hobbles—as his name indicates: “Swellfoot.”

It's as if those feet were swollen with eyes, overcompensating for some other mutilation. Emerson: “I become a transparent eyeball”... — ...“we are lined with eyes; we see with our feet.” The eyes continue Ezekiel's vision (1:18) of the heavenly chariot, its inter-revolving wheels “full of eyes round about.” And in Zachariah 4:10 the “eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth.” Blake: “The Chariot Wheels filled with Eyes rage along the howling Valley.”

Jung finds such symbols “multiple luminosities of the unconscious.” suggesting that “complexes possess a kind of consciousness, a luminosity of their own, which, I conjecture, expresses itself in the symbol of the soul-spark, multiple eyes (*polyopthalmia*), and the starry heaven.”

Eyes are multiplied in the blind; into seeing and seen or present and past, seeing and sensing or knowing otherwise, outer and inner, knower and known, singer and song. Blind Lemon Jefferson. Blind Blake. Blind Willie Johnson. Blind Boy Fuller. Blind Willie McTell.

---

\* Here is Emblem XLII of Michael Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618), with its accompanying epigrams “Let Nature be your guide, and with your Art / Follow keenly her lead, without which you go astray. / With sapience as staff, seasoned experience vivifies sight. / Let learning be your lamp, dispelling dark / That throngs of things and words may not disarm you.” The term “alchemy” comes from several Sanskrit roots concentrated on blackness, nigredo. **Au I** = down, and is rooted in, “avatar” (au ter=cross over). Vishnu's avatars include Rama and Krishna, both of which mean *black* in Sanskrit. (Krishna is **kers II**, black.) In Egypt the Nile's black effluvial flood is *khem*. **Gheu** = pour, in Greek *khein*. Juice is *khulos* and *khumos*. Chemistry's chums, the black patron gods. Flooders.

Certain Dahomey & Yoruba gods reappear as *loas* in vodun; roadside heavy breathers in Delta blues (Legba, Ogun, Djamballah) resonant with Orpheus, the sacrificed singer.

To be weighted down with lightness: the emancipating bruise.

(“If it wasn't for bad luck, I wouldn't have no luck at all”)

To lighten. Make light of. Arouse elation, buoyant ascension.

Legba, Esu Elegbara, god of the crossroads, 2loosens knowledge” (Henry Louis Gates). *Get loose, lighten up.*

Resolution as laughter. The goal of interpretation is *to air out*, ventilate, expend stale accumulations with a laughing snort. Not ascertain meaning, nor place or fix or determine it, but *uncork it*.

Laughter is the sneeze of the soul.

"Procreation and sneezing appear to be the distinctive manifestations of the *psyche*. Here, then, strange as it may seem, must be sought the origin of the name, if its nearest kin be ψυχεν, ‘to blow’” (R-B. Oniaxis).

Bird (Charlie Parker) could even blow on the nod.

(“Rapids to baptism

In one blue river.” [Lawon Fusao Inada])

When you read and find yourself nodding off, Hermes is on his way to guide you to an underworld, a crepuscular subtext.

For the Greeks, a contractual arrangement was signed by a nod, pledged in the name of Psyche. “A sneeze is also a nod, a nod not expected or controlled by the conscious self but an apparently spontaneous expression of the life in the head”

(Onians).

The sanctity of the sneeze: prophecy. Nodding acknowledges prophecy. Or: a nod acknowledges the prophetic, the kerygmatic annunciation. Al-chymia's chimera—from *nigredo* to *rubedo* and into the clarified *calcinatio* or *albedo*.

The ointments, the facilitators. Regulators. In the *Koran* the angelic beings are

“those who repulse”

“those who recite”

“those who distribute”

“those who are sent”

“those who disperse”

“those who seize” “those who extract gently”

“those who precede”

“those who float”

“those who deliver the word”

“those who conduct the cosmic tasks”

“those arrayed in order”

Everything written on the sacrosanct Tablet needs these angels for its actualization. In the mystical alphabet of the Dhauqi branch of the Chishtiyya Sabiriyya the enunciated letters are lunar mansions.

"Man's heart is between two of God's fingers, and He turns it as He pleases," a Muslim adage has it. What is written takes many forms. So "One has to cultivate, first of all, the eye to see the selfsame reality of ink in all letters, and then to see the letters as so many intrinsic modifications of the ink." (Haydar-i Amuli {d. 1385})

“As long as Oedipus is the protagonist on the stage, we are not Oedipus. Let his terrible secret be exposed to the whole world, provided we can leave the theater with our secret intact.

Myth is a powerful hypnotic, in which cultures inscribe their own ideology, and the mythologist's task is certainly to discover the little secrets that one ideology or another hides away in the folds of myth.

But myth also reveals that which was to be concealed. Like our dreams, which seem to disguise our secrets to protect our sleep, myth keeps confessing the very secrets that it was constructed to conceal. With a chorus of signifiers it circles around the traumatic rupture, where the subject vanished into the field of the Other” (Norman Austin).

One correction: The mythologist's true "task" is not to discover but to dislodge the secrets (the more unintentionally the better) which flutter up, buoyant, like moths.

The numinous is creaturely presence. Secrets are creatures. Little secrets

“hidden away in the folds of myth”:

Myths are the genitals of the collective unconscious.

Is "collective unconscious" an oxymoron? Unconscious is *uncollected consciousness*. Consciousness in its *menstruum universale* and its dissemination is endlessly dispersed, “un-concealed,” but scattered, lost, bereft (the paradigmatic phallic disorder: post-coitum tristum, yearning for “full presence”).

Myth is tumescence and flow, the waxing and waning of cosmogenesis, fecundating psyche.

“No sooner have you grabbed hold of it than myth opens our into a fan of a thousand segments. Here the variant is the origin.” (Roberto Calasso)

The numinous is creaturely  
presence. Secrets are creatures.

Myth, says Detienne, invents what is  
memorable.

In the *Aitreya Upanishad* (1.4); “The Self heated ‘Man.’ When it was heated, its mouth broke off, like an egg. From the mouth, there was speech; from speech, fire. Its nostrils peeled away. From the eyes, there was vision; from vision, the sun. Its ears broke off. From the ears, there was hearing; from hearing, the cardinal directions. Its skin peeled off. From the skin, there was bodily hair; from the bodily hair, plants and trees. Its heart sloughed off. From the heart, there was mind; from mind, the moon. Its navel peeled off. From the navel, there was breath of anal grit; from gritty breath, death. Its penis broke off. From the penis, there was semen; from semen, the waters.”

Ananse, Ashanti trickster, sets his children to scheme against a rival;

- *Father broke his penis in seven places, and went to a blacksmith for repairs.*
- Then where's your momma?
- *She went to the river to fetch water, and her pot would have been broken but she caught it just in time. But she didn't quite, so she's gone back to finish catching it.*

«Creation seemed a mighty Crack

To make me visible.» (Emily Dickinson)

The path you search for appears only in proportion as you disappear,

Blunt the sharpness;  
Untangle the knots;  
Soften the glare;

The way is empty; yet use will not drain it.

(The translator [*Tao Te Ching*, #4] comments: “The word in the text meaning ‘full’ has been emended to one meaning ‘empty’.”)

Like the stretching of a bow  
the exalted's brought low  
the debased is raised up  
the excessive is deficient  
& the meagre abounds in gratuity. (*Tao Te Ching*, #72)

The bow and the lyre illustrate for Heraclitus (fr. 51) that “that which is at variance with itself agrees with itself.” And there is another bow that gives life in the pun (gives life to the pun): “its name is life, its work is death”:

το τόξω ονομα βίος, έργου δε θάνατος. (fr. 48) The pun of *bíos* and *biós* conflates bow/life, the difference being exclusively in the placement of the accent.

Application of a dollop.

Illumination: something burns so brightly that what it illuminates is actually obscured: the eye is “blinded” by the light, by its *incandescence*.

There is also *sonorescence*. “In our sonorescence, nature and artifice compose each other's excesses and their excesses” (Stephen Ross). This “reciprocal excess” is a habitation in doubling—a mark of mind, a notch in matter.

Like Mercury's counsel aglow in Dolphy's alto.

In music, “The note began as something which was pulling and stretching, but does it want to go on like this?” (Ernst Bloch). The function of time in music is as undertow, to make the instantaneous felt as re-iteration, the doing as done again in undoing; the instrument itself a timer, a plasm-Geiger taking the pulse of the place. (Note is tone.)

Pulsional appetite: music deploys humans in productive consort with waves (“play it like a waterfall”, Duke Ellington told his reed men), consecrated in bop as a punctiform *via regia* (Kenny Clarke, Max Roach, Art Blakey, Roy Haynes).

Before bop, Betty Boop was the *look* of hot jazz, its bubble, its droops and dips, its *azz*. Wriggling the as if off with her hip shake.

Valéry: “By the indirect route of musical stimuli I am, in some strange fashion, *combined with myself*.”

“I *seem* to experience all this, for actually I cannot tell whether I am subject or object...”

Senses awaken; stretch, rouse. Aroused, they multiply.

Each sense exercising its autonomy, gnawing, gnawing.

“I ‘thought’ and desired in my fingers.

If I had made a man, I should certainly have put the brain and soul in his fingertips”

(Helen Keller).

### ***Excursus on Monk***

THELONIOUS MONK made the piano a theatrical space, a theatre endowed with volume, depth, shadow, vanishing perspectival points, and wings. In the wings you hear (“Brilliant Corners”) heavy furniture being moved, yet oddly as if airborne.

Monk: someone grumbling aloud in his sleep, turning over. Gymnastic somnambulation.

Monk gave Coltrane pause. The acoustic residuum of tact.

Monk fit his hands to the ivories like a surveyor placing the tripod. Distance, span, plane, and incline. *Inclination*.

With Monk, as in Webern, you never know the exact measure being applied, so you don't see the size of the object that, in a system of representation, would figure into the calculus of a ground. With some of his pieces you don't know whether “tune” is skin or bone; whether it holds up and constitutes the internal structural horizon, or whether instead (as in Roland Barthes' erotic principle of hermeneutics, interpretation is like peeling layers off an onion: there's no core, no seed, no bottom, just a neverending *end*

*to onion*— like the one about the world perched on the back of a elephant ... and what's the elephant standing on? A turtle. And the turtle? Well, it's *turtles all the way down*) every figural motif is an excursion not distinct in principle from a series of steps, bends, twists, none of which are ever done with any sort of calculation of their place in a finite series. Every gesture is the infinitude compacted into the moment of its release.

With Monk, it's all denotation, no connotation. A plectrum of the cogito: fingers drumming the edge of a table. Or the edge of a seat during a lecture, hearing not the analytical persuasion of the talk but the budgeting of sidesteps, tones, the *largo* of the drawl, the crunch of its release. The size of the footprint, handspin.

Each rhythmic cell. harmonic phrase: prismatic alliances. So no embellishments: the grace notes are all down there, nose to the ground, canine. Reticular activating stem, perched with insistence, then dealt.

Monk's tunes are the propositional counterparts of a labyrinth. Getting in and getting out again are what it's all about. Crossing a tricky crevasse. Monk's pianistic applications disclose survival tools. He plays not according to predetermined rhythms, but as someone crossing a river, stone by stone. There is the hesitation, the creative preparation, the foresight—followed by a contagion of leaps, clustered, bippety-bip-bip, bop, budobbopp. Learning to roll with the fall. A metronome coming undone or unwound. Being “wound up”—tense or nervous—is the antithesis of everything Monk's about. Cool chops, a cool that smoulders, and goes.

In pop-song format the “bridge” of the AABA 32-bar framework is also called the *release*, the *inside* or the *channel*. Think of a floodgate, listening to Monk: a volume of liquid pressed against a restraint, then suddenly released. Monk's gambit: *to compose the release*.

Rotundity. Bell of the horn. Dome of the rock. The sonorescent cupola of a solo driven by *duende* darkens the listener's pulse, even as it “consults” the wind (as García Lorca says of *cante jondo*). The pregnant pause; and the billowing skirt on the line in the wind (Art Ensemble: *Full Force* photo). The inflated vibrating garment becomes, at a distance, an eye. Even sound pays a silent visit to *Polyopthalmia*.

The halo: “an absolutely inessential supplement” — “matter that does not remain beneath the form, but surrounds it with a halo” (Agamben).

Atilt in the ease of otherwise, the tiny budge of apocalyptic ellipse, where “everything will be as it is now, just a little different” (say the Hassidim).

Spiritual correspondences seek equilibrium as attunement to—rather than cessation or cancellation of—opposites. So, in Islamic alchemy, “without the idea of the balance, there can be no worlds in correspondence with each other.” “The science of the Balance spatializes the succession of time by substituting for the order of succession the order of simultaneity, the unity of the ‘cupolas’” (*Henry Corbin*).

“Having reached the *interior*, one finds oneself paradoxically on the *outside*... Yet, strange as it may seem, once the journey is completed the reality which has hitherto been an inner and hidden one turns out to envelop, surround, or contain that which at first was outer and visible” (Corbin).

{“To lower oneself is to rise in the domain of moral gravity. Moral gravity makes us fall toward the heights” (Simone Weil).}

“Spiritual reality can therefore not be found ‘*in the where.*’ The ‘*where*’ is in it.”

“After we realize the emptiness of things, everything becomes real—not substantial.” — {where “nothing is clear; everything is significant” [Heidegger]} — “When we have emptiness we are always prepared for watching the flashing.” “Every existence is a flashing into the vast phenomenal world.” (Shunryu Suzuki)

As Lightning on a Landscape  
Exhibits Sheets of Place —  
Not yet suspected — but for Flash —  
And Click — and Suddenness. (Dickinson)

In *Etidorhpa* (1895) by John Uri Lloyd (Cincinnati pharmacist):

“As the tip of the whip-lash passes with the lash, so through life the soul of man proceeds with the body. As there is a point just when the tip of the whip-lash is on the edge of its return, where all motion of the line that bounds the tip ends, so there is a motionless point when the soul starts onward from the body of man. As the tip of the whip lash sends its cry through space, not while it is in motion either way, but from the point where motion ceases, the spaceless, timeless point that lies between the backward and the forward, so the soul of man leaves a cry (eternity) at the critical point. It is the death echo, and thus each snap of the life-thread throws an eternity, its own eternity, into eternity's seas, and each eternity is made up of the entities thus cast from the critical point.”

It could even be called a *diacritical* point. Spencer Brown's “distinction” or “mark.”

Desire encases language in the duplexity of conscious / unconscious.

Symbol cements this bifurcation into the enigma of incarnation.

Desire says “one,” to which symbol adds “two,” together making three.

—The sum does not cancel and supersede the two, but preserves them in its harbor or shelter. *Aufhebung*.

A symbol is a door, an opening, a passageway.

Mouth: tongue : vulva: urethra: nested frames, limits, *tao*.

\*

Pascal: “I had a thought. I have forgotten it. In its place I write that I've forgotten it.”

What if the notion you thought you'd never remember returned to you in all its

fullness, integrity, coherence, and it was:

“What if closure, coherence, and mastery kept on repeating itself, insinuating its finality to us, not in narrative form or eschatological vision, but as a logic of the sentence, the paradigm of grammar itself?”

“If water boils in a kettle, steam comes out of the kettle and also depicted steam comes out of the sketched kettle. But what if one insisted on saying that there must also be something boiling in the sketch of the kettle?” (Wittgenstein)

And if you didn't need to insist?

What if words themselves were sparrows pecking Zeuxis' grapes?

So all the animals peeled themselves and turned into drums, stretching their skins for the heads of the drums, and each of these heads could think. Think *dunk*.

“Life is an ecstasy.” (Emerson)

“Thought is a permanent orgasm.” (René Thom)