

**Negative Theologies, Spiritual Know-How's, Discourses that Do,
Divine Unions, and Absolute Solitude:**

***The Cloud of Unknowing*, Kierkegaard, Kafka, and de Certeau**

by

Benjamin McFry

(Under the Direction of Ronald Bogue)

ABSTRACT

Informed by the work of Michel de Certeau, this dissertation will explore how the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Søren Kierkegaard, and Franz Kafka present negative theologies that promote the development of particular spiritual know-how's, which by using repetitive practices of discourse, lead to unity with God at the expense of absolute solitude.

INDEX WORDS: Mysticism, Negative Theology, Apophasis, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, *The Book of Privy Counsel*, Kierkegaard, Kafka, de Certeau

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Benjamin McFry

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by

BENJAMIN MCFRY

Major Professor:	Ronald Bogue
Committee:	Katarzyna Jerzak Dorothy Figueira Katharina Wilson Carmen Acevedo Butcher

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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For Paige

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Introduction:
via *Negativa* — a Way to Negative Theologies

The Life of De Certeau

Est mystique celui ou celle qui ne peut s'arrêter de marcher et qui, avec la certitude de ce qui lui manque, sait de chaque lieu et de chaque objet que ce n'est pas ça, qu'on ne peut résider ici ni se contenter de cela.
(de Certeau, *La Fable mystique*, 411)

He or she is a mystic who cannot stop walking and who, with the certainty of that which he or she lacks, knows about every place and about every object that it is *not that*, that one cannot remain *here* nor be content with *that*.¹

The above quotation from the final page of Michel de Certeau's *La Fable Mystique: XVIe-XVIIe siècle*, tome I (Gallimard, 1982) [*The Mystic Fable: Volume One — the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Univ. Chicago Press, 1992)] is a definition in pursuit of a most elusive term — *mystic*. It is inspired by de Certeau's reading of the seventeenth-century mystic Angelus Silesius's *Cherubinischer Wandersmann* (1657) [*The Cherubic Pilgrim*, literally *The Cherubic Wandering-man*],² a collection of mystical poetry full of paradoxes that ostensibly meanders through the pantheistical, though it was granted ecclesiastical imprimatur by the Catholic Church. De Certeau's sauntering definition and ambling inspiration capture the essence of mysticism in its transience, a quality that de Certeau himself valued in his own life.

Michel-Jean-Emmanuel de la Barge de Certeau was born in 1925 in Chambéry in the Savoie department in the Rhône-Alpes region of southeastern France. The first of four children,

¹ Unless noted otherwise, all translations from Middle English, French, Danish, and German appearing with the original language are my own. Citations without the original language are from published translations, as noted.

² Angelus Silesius was the pseudonym of Johann Scheffler (1624-1677), and his *Cherubinischer Wandersmann* was first titled *Geistreiche Sinn- und Schluss-reime* [*Clever Sense- and End-rhymes*].

de Certeau was a son of two orphans who were both adopted into noble families,³ and he spent much of his childhood on the family estate assisting the tenant farmers with their chores in between school sessions and hiking in the mountains, an ability he would put to use in his teenage years when delivered messages for the French resistance. After completing his secondary education, de Certeau obtained degrees in classics and philosophy at the universities of Grenoble, Lyon, and Paris from fall 1944 to spring 1950, interrupted intermittently by long travels on bicycle across much of the French countryside. He then undertook religious training at a seminary in Lyon, where he entered the Jesuit order in late 1950, and despite his university degrees, he was required to earn yet another B.A. in philosophy and theology. He was ordained in 1956.

De Certeau spent his next years in the service of his order around Latin America (Brazil, Argentina, Chile) while working on his dissertation on Saint Augustine; however, he was asked by his superiors to change the topic of his research to Pierre Favre (1506-1546), a co-founder of the Jesuit Order, and he returned to Paris to study where he earned his doctorate in theology from the Sorbonne in 1960 with a dissertation on the of Favre's diaries. Afterwards, de Certeau turned to the writings of Jean-Joseph Surin, another wandering mystic and a principal focus of de Certeau's scholarship throughout his life. In the following years, De Certeau published frequently, edited several journals of his order, and was a founding member of Jacques Lacan's *École freudienne*, but it was his commentary on the events in Paris in May 1968 — writings in journals and later books, his interviews in newspapers, and his speeches in public address, on the radio, and on committees — that brought him into the public spotlight, typified most eloquently

³ De Certeau's father was orphaned at birth, and his mother was orphaned at age eight. (Dosse, *Le marcheur blessé*, La Découverte, 2002, pp. 29-30) One can also see in Dosse's title of his biography of de Certeau [The Injured Walker] the notion of a pilgrim.

in the often quoted sentence from the opening lines of his article “Prendre la parole” [The Capture of Speech] in the June-July issue of *Études* in 1968:

“En mai dernier, on a pris la parole comme on a pris la Bastille en 1789.”
(Dosse, 159)⁴
[Last May, speech was seized as the Bastille was seized in 1789.]

With his new-found fame, de Certeau embarked on a prodigious journey through scholarship and teaching in the last eighteen years of his life, publishing on demonic possessions (*La Possession de Loudun* [1970]), on historicity and historiography (*L’Absent de l’histoire* [1973] and *L’Écriture de l’histoire* [1975]), on sociolinguistics (*Une politique de la langue. La Révolution française et les patois : l’enquête de Grégoire* [1975]), on mass media, economics, and everyday life (*L’Invention du quotidien* [1980]), and on mysticism (*La Fable mystique* [1982]); concurrently, he taught in the fields of theology, anthropology, and history at schools around Paris and later lectured on literature at the University of California at San Diego. Sadly, de Certeau’s lifelong pilgrimage was ended by cancer as he began his most prestigious position in the fall of 1984 as *Directeur d’Études* at the *École des Hautes Études et Sciences Sociales* in Paris.

Though Michel de Certeau is gone, his prolific discipline in writing left a literary estate that continues to be published and translated in the twenty-first century, and scholars continue returning to his work, especially to two texts from his latter years: *L’Invention du quotidien: tome I. Arts de faire* (Union Générale, 1980) [*The Practice of Everyday Life* (Univ. Cal. Press, 1984)] and *La Fable mystique: XVIe-XVIIe siècle, tome I* (Gallimard, 1982) [*The Mystic Fable:*

⁴ My quotation comes from Dosse’s *Le marcheur blessé* (Gallimard, 2002), which cites the issue of *Études* as its source. De Certeau’s article is reprinted in *La Prise de parole* (1968) and *La Prise de parole et autres écrits politiques* (1994) and in translation in *The Capture of Speech and Other Political Writings* (1997).

Volume One — the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (Univ. Chicago Press, 1992)],⁵ which shall be the foci of this inquiry and the way to our own destination, beginning with *L’Invention du quotidien*.

De Certeau’s *Everday Life*

This essay is part of a continuing investigation of the ways in which users — commonly assumed to be passive and guided by established rules — operate. The point is not so much to discuss this elusive yet fundamental subject as to make such a discussion possible; that is, by means of inquiries and hypotheses, to indicate pathways for further research. This goal will be achieved if everyday practices, “ways of operating” or doing things, no longer appear as merely the obscure background of social activity, and if a body of theoretical questions, methods, categories, and perspectives, by penetrating this obscurity, make it possible to articulate them.⁶

(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xi)

Arts de faire — the subtitle of Michel de Certeau’s *L’Invention du quotidien* — appropriately strikes at the heart of the matter with which de Certeau is concerned in this text: making the non-discursive actions of everyday life, what de Certeau refers to as “ways of operating” [‘manière de faire’], effable. The quotation above begins de Certeau’s General Introduction in which he outlines the procedures and methodology of his text, followed by an immediate explanation of the fundamental terms and concepts of his work in the first paragraph.

⁵ The literal translation of *L’Invention du quotidien: tome I. Arts de faire* is *The Invention of the Everyday: Volume I — Ways of Doing*. De Certeau coauthored a second volume of that text, *L’Invention du quotidien: tome II. Habiter, Cuisner* (Flammarion, 1980) [(literally) *The Invention of the Everyday: Volume II — Living, Cooking*], with Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol, which is an entirely different sort of book than the first and thus is not discussed in this dissertation. The condensation of the full title of the first volume by the translator (Steven Rendall) into a combination of the main title and subtitle problematizes the translation of the title of the second volume, which was remedied by the translator of the second volume (Timothy J. Tomasik) by retaining that condensation and adding the original subtitle of the second volume to it: *The Practice of Everyday Life: Volume 2, Living and Cooking* (Univ. Minnesota Press, 1998). There was no second volume of *La Fable mystique* published.

⁶ This and other quotations are taken from Steven Rendall’s translation (see note 4). However, in the first sentence of this passage in the original French, de Certeau makes mention of the second volume of this work: “La recherche publiée partiellement en ces deux volumes. . .” (de Certeau, *L’Invention du quotidien*, Union Générale, 1980, p. 9).

One of these terms is “users” [*usagers*]. De Certeau prefers this term instead of the more common “consumer,” which he argues is a misnomer, for it implies that people do nothing with what they have but merely consume, i.e., they only passively receive products, tangible or abstract, that are produced purposefully for them, and they have no means of reworking or manipulating the products for their own ends. De Certeau believes that our daily operations, the quotidian, are not “the obscure background of social activity” but are rather the constant re-appropriations of culture by the user. The term *user*, however, though it would signify an individual, is not to be taken to mean an individual in the sense of a definite, singular being “of which groups are supposed to be formed and to which they are supposed to be always reducible” (de Certeau xi). Rather de Certeau posits the user or individual as always being both determined by social relations and “a locus in which an incoherent (and often contradictory) plurality of such relational determinations interact” (de Certeau xi). Moreover, de Certeau’s focus is “modes of operations or schemata of action, and not directly the subjects (or persons) who are their authors or vehicles” (de Certeau xi). The purpose of de Certeau’s work is “to make explicit the systems of operational combination (*les combinatoires d’opérations*) which also compose a ‘culture’” (de Certeau xi). In other words, de Certeau’s text seeks a way of expressing the system of methods that individuals, as nebulous concentrations of plural social relations and hence “components” of a culture, use to carry out their everyday lives in societies that see them merely as docile “consumers”⁷ — when in reality these “users” make use of the culture’s “products”: The user produces his or her own product from or with another product by “poaching” [*braconner*].

“Poaching” in the Certeauian sense, is how a user takes a “proper” product, i.e., a product, either

⁷ De Certeau gives the helpful example of incomplete studies that examine only the representations of a society and the individual’s behavior, such as “the analysis of the images broadcast by television (representation) and of the time spent watching television (behavior).” Such an analysis could be completed, or at least “complemented by a study of what the cultural consumer ‘makes’ or ‘does’ during this time and with these images” (de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Univ. California Press, 1984, xii).

designed or intended for a particular (cultural) use or one whose use has been established in a given way and thus made proper, and makes something of it or with it other than the intended or established use. *Poaching* is an appropriate term for such an act because it implies the trespass onto property — a space that is defined, recognized, and owned — in order for the poacher to make his or her own use of the property, though the term must be taken to mean *successful* poaching, since the poacher's being caught would ruin the operation by having it identified and logged; the poacher's trail is found, the poacher is spotted, the poacher is nabbed, the authorities are summoned, the poacher's name is recorded, his or her features described and photographed, the poacher's actions are examined and studied by the court in reference to the law, and the poacher is put into the proper place of the jail.

Though de Certeau uses the term *poaching*, a necessarily illegal or subversive act should not be implied by the term. The user's everyday uses of products are not conscious efforts to overthrow authority; they are ways of taking advantage of situations (combinations of operations) without being recognized by authority by escaping the various means by which an authority would identify, record, or place the individual. However, the connotation of *poaching* as a clandestine act should apply, as well as its denotation as a trespass onto *proper*-ty.

This poaching, consumer's production, a user's making use, or "consumption" is abundant in our modern world but also unrecognized:

The "making" in question is a production, a Poiesis — but a hidden one, because it is scattered over areas defined and occupied by systems of "production" (television, urban development, commerce, etc.), and because the steadily increasing expansion of these systems no longer leaves "consumers" any place in which they can indicate what they make or do with the products of these systems. To a rationalized, expansionist and at the same time centralized, clamorous, and spectacular production corresponds another production, called "consumption." The latter is devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products,

but rather through its ways of using the products imposed by a dominant economic order.

(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xii)

Though “consumption” takes place everywhere all the time, it goes unrecognized because of the modern world’s increasing dependence on writing, or more specifically on scientific writing, which de Certeau calls “technics.”⁸ In order to “show” how an act takes place, even a simple everyday act, data must be collected and recorded, analyses made, and reports written to “translate” this act for mass dissemination in cultures with established norms of understanding and knowing. But in this process of showing, a system of logic must be overlaid onto an event that does not necessarily or entirely operate within a system of a specific logic, although the parts of the act which can be captured, grasped, and extracted with this overlay must be then organized into a coherent representation of the act nonetheless. A remainder does however always remain hidden, unmapped, and unrecognized. That is the “consumption” that slips through the cracks — a *je ne sais quoi* of a *savoir faire* — the process of an everyday know-how that is so discreet it cannot be detailed with our current methods of reporting. It is the non-discursive remainder that cannot be enunciated in our language at this time.

Two further Certeauian terms, perhaps the most often cited from *L’Invention du quotidien*, must be introduced: strategy and tactics.⁹ These terms expand the view of the act of consumption to a societal and cultural scale. What de Certeau calls “strategies” are forces or influences emanating from defined and recognized entities that construct relations with their exteriors. They are the effectivities of dogmas, ideologies, phenomenologies, institutions,

⁸ *Technics* is the translation given by the translator of *L’Invention du quotidien* (Steven Rendall) in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Univ. Cal. 1984) for *la technique*, which corresponds roughly to the English *technology* or *technics*; the difficulty of translating such a substantivized adjective will be discussed in further detail later with de Certeau’s term *la mystique*.

⁹ These terms in the French are *stratégie* (de Certeau, *L’Invention du quotidien*, Gallimard, 1980, p. 20) and *tactique* (21).

enterprises, or any other such properly delineated loci. They are the powers of the sorting and winnowing of taxonomies, cartographies, and other systems of identification and classification. They are the faculties and capacities of dominions, rationalities, and establishments to organize, codify, and label.

De Certeau defines strategy as “the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power ([such as] a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an ‘environment’” (de Certeau xix). He says that “[a] strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it ([such as] competitors, adversaries, ‘clientèles,’ ‘targets,’ or ‘objects’ of research)” (de Certeau xix). De Certeau also claims that “[p]olitical, economic, and scientific rationality has been constructed on this strategic model” (de Certeau xix). Strategy is employed by institutions and systems of power to organize and delineate space and time and objects and entities in them, as well as to construct how they are conceptualized. De Certeau uses the example of a city’s layout, which is a grid of streets, sidewalks, fences, etc. designed and approved by an authority, as an example of a system based on strategy. The city’s grid defines what is proper to it and in essence defines the city itself.

What de Certeau calls “tactics” are methods of operating and ways of doing that are unrecognizable and unmappable to strategists, though they occur in the everyday places proper to strategies. Tactics are the know-how and skills employed in the process of users’ consumption. This term denotes practices that allow one to elude systems and systemics while simultaneously using common pieces and ordinary parts of those systems to their own individual ends. They are ways of evading the mechanisms of a network, of forgetting rigid distinctions, and of being

forgotten by those who would observe and classify — all while not inventing new systems and orders but modifying the conditions and products of present ones ad hoc.

De Certeau defines a tactic as

a calculus which cannot count on a ‘proper’ [...] nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of the tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances. . . . It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into ‘opportunities’ [*occasions*].

(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xix)

Tactics are employed by the individual when navigating the systems created by the networks of strategies. In the example of the city’s layout, tactics are used by the individual pedestrian to move within the city. Tactics can at times follow the course of the city’s strategy or can be employed when the pedestrian cuts a corner on the sidewalk, jaywalks, or gets away with walking on the lawn with the “Keep Off Grass” sign. The pedestrian eludes a system and creates a unique path that leaves no trace leading specifically back to that individual.

De Certeau gives numerous other examples of the interplay of strategy and tactics, but one most salient to this discussion is found in his chapter “Reading as Poaching”:¹⁰

Reading is only one aspect of consumption, but a fundamental one. In a society that is increasingly written, organized by the power of modifying things and of reforming structures on the basis of scriptural models (whether scientific, economic, or political), transformed little by little into combined “texts” (be they administrative, urban, industrial, etc.), the binomial set production-consumption can often be replaced by its general equivalent and indicator, the binomial set writing-reading. The power established by the will to rewrite history (a will that is by turn reformist, scientific, revolutionary, or pedagogical) on the basis of scriptural operations that are at first carried out in a circumscribed field, has as its corollary a major division between reading and writing.

¹⁰ To anyone familiar with literary studies, the concept of de Certeau’s “Reading as Poaching” will likely sound trite; however, in the context of the entire book (on culture) it is rather remarkable in that it situates reading within the domain of action and practice. Unfortunately, a full discussion of this matter is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 168)

Writing functions strategically in that it codifies and fixes an act, concept, ruling, etc. according to a prescribed rhetorical, lexical, and grammatical system and should have a “literal” meaning. However, de Certeau argues that this so-called literality is merely a part of strategies effected and perpetuated by strategic entities (the academy, the critic, the law, the priest, etc.). We, as users, poach upon these texts in that we trespass on their literality in reading them and purloin our own meanings, which are personalized according to our own particular idioms. In a way, all readers are ad hoc, outlaw artisans, constantly crafting new intents from texts according to a self-determined hermeneutics.

Overall, De Certeau’s goal in *L’Invention du quotidien* is to make a theory of “consumption” possible, to create a forum for articulating everyday practices. De Certeau is not so much promoting his own particular theory as he is creating a vocabulary and methodology for creating such a theory, to make a space for theorizing the everyday. Essentially, much of de Certeau’s text is apophatic in that it either identifies the need for such theories in light of current examinations of culture that do not recognize everyday practices, exactly because that is not their goal, or it identifies incorrect endeavors into creating and applying such theories. De Certeau himself leaves his own remainder, i.e., he does not explicitly produce a theory of the everyday, only calls for it and attempts to create the means necessary to allow it. However, throughout the text, even in the first paragraph, de Certeau informs his reader that that is his deliberate purpose,¹¹ and de Certeau scholars continue to stress that purpose:

De Certeau’s work should serve as a precaution when it comes to evaluating or interpreting the everyday: as in Freud, a fixed key that could unlock the puzzle of the everyday needs to be refused. The desire to produce a catalogue of minor

¹¹ “The point is not so much to discuss this elusive yet fundamental subject as to make such a discussion possible; that is, by means of inquiries and hypotheses, to indicate pathways for further research” (de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Univ. California Press, 1984, xi).

subversions (ripped jeans, skateboarding and so on) needs to be replaced by a form of attention that necessitates the invention of a 'tool kit' that might allow the everyday to be heard, not as background noise, but as a foregrounded voice. Or rather, what is needed are 'tool-kits' that can perceive different registers of a polyphonic everyday.

(Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*, 171)

De Certeau seeks to create a discourse for the non-discursive actions of everyday life: a non-discursive discourse. This goal is something, indeed, that not even de Certeau's fellow post-structuralists could *fully* achieve. De Certeau uses Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, among others, as his straw men, as it were, when identifying the problems that have persisted in modern attempts at theory:

A particular problem arises when, instead of being a discourse on other discourses, as is usually the case, theory has to advance over an area where there are no longer any discourses. There is a sudden unevenness of terrain: the ground on which verbal language rests begins to fail. The theorizing operation finds itself at the limits of the terrain where it normally functions, like an automobile at the edge of a cliff. Beyond and below lies the ocean.

(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 61)

Before discussing Foucault and Bourdieu in particular, de Certeau outlines the general problem that all fields and disciplines face when discussing the "remainder" that is "constituted by the part of human experience that has not been tamed and symbolized in language" (de Certeau 61). He continues, "An individual science can avoid this direct confrontation. It grants itself a priori the conditions that allow it to encounter things only in its own limited field where it can 'verbalize' them" (de Certeau 61). De Certeau believes that Foucault and Bourdieu make a similar mistake when approaching a non-discursive discourse: "first, *cut out*; then *turn over*"¹² (de Certeau 62).

¹²De Certeau's French reads: "d'abord, découper; puis, retourner" (de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien*, Union Générale, 1980, p. 127).

This “cut out” [*découper*] refers to the removal of practices from their milieu, albeit an indefinite milieu, in order to study them. Not only does the removal isolate them for study, but it reforms the “fragment” into its own whole. Moreover, the “cut out” makes the practice under examination foreign and exotic, something to be domesticated by theory, an enigma to be made familiar through explanation. De Certeau sees Foucault’s “panoptic” procedures from *Discipline and Punish*¹³ as a practice isolated from the multitudes that produce or endure it; he sees Bourdieu as localizing the practices or “strategies” with his “Theory of Practice”¹⁴ to particular inhabitants in particular places.

After the “cut out” comes the “turn over,” [*retourner*] in which the now alienated practices are inverted. When “cut out,” the practice appears to be in need of explanation, in need of a theory; but, when “turned over,” the theory is made to come from the practice — the practice, first made foreign, is now made familiar in order to give the explanation. The practice then becomes “the element that illuminates theory and sustains discourse” (de Certeau 63). During the turn over, the hidden practice, identified as hidden and apart from the system of the seen, is theorized using the system of the seen, and made to appear everywhere; the disorderly practice, identified as being without order and apart from a system of order, is theorized using the system of order, and made part of an orderly system:

In Foucault, the procedures hidden in the details of educational, military, or clinical control, micro-apparatuses without discursive legitimacy, . . . become the reason through which both the system of our society and that of the human science is illuminated. *Through* them and *in* them, nothing escapes Foucault In Bourdieu, the remote and opaque place organized by wily, polymorphic and transgressive ‘strategies’ in relation to the order of discourse is also inverted in order to give its plausibility and its essential articulation to a theory recognizing the reproduction of the same order everywhere.

¹³ See Michel Foucault’s *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la Prison* (Gallimard, 1975).

¹⁴ See Pierre Bourdieu’s *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique, précédé de trois études d’ethnologie kabyle*, (Droz, 1972).

(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 63)

Also, though the practices were originally chosen and isolated from a milieu, after the “turn over,” they are discussed as metonyms for other parts of that milieu, as if there were no need for isolation in the first place, though there *was*, of course. De Certeau lodges a similar complaint in the opening of his first section of *La Fable mystique*.

De Certeau's Life of *mystics*

Mystic literature did not begin in the sixteenth century, although it found its own name and formal features during the second half of that century. It would be ridiculous, however, to trace the preliminary elements that, after the fact, after that space had been defined, permitted a ‘tradition’ to be constituted for it.

(de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 29)

Again, now in *La Fable mystique* (1982), de Certeau cautions against defining a phenomenon, in this case mystic literature, in the context of a milieu from which it is supposed to have emerged yet from which it is also supposedly isolatable. De Certeau suggests rather that this phenomenon should be examined through the *practices* that effected it — one ecstatic, one technical:

A withdrawal (ecstatic) brought about by the seduction of the Other, and a virtuosity (technical)¹⁵ in making words confess what they are unable to say. Rapture and rhetoric: these two apparently contradictory practices are related to what language became at the threshold of the Renaissance.

(de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 29)

The “withdrawal” to which de Certeau refers is the allure those who would be mystics felt toward the uncanny experience of God and away from the established forms of worship. The “virtuosity” is the ability developed to create a new language — or more specifically new ways of using language — to express such divine experiences. De Certeau argues that these two

¹⁵ The terms in the French are *soustraction* [withdrawal]; *extatique* [ecstatic]; *virtuosité* [virtuosity]; *technique* [technical] — the parentheses in the quotation above are de Certeau's.

practices aligned in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries not only with each other but also with the cultural progressions of their time to allow for the creation of what we know by the term *mysticism*:

Ockhamism — and this is a symbol of a larger evolution — stripped discourse of its ultimate verification, allowing for the progressive separation that took place between an unknown absolute of the divine will and a technician's freedom, capable of manipulating words that are no longer anchored in being. At this point the older tradition, to which the 'madness for Christ' testifies, found a linguistic instrument, suitable to mediating a 'modern' theory, *mystics*.¹⁶
(de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 29-30)

The term "*mystics*" is the given translation of de Certeau's *la mystique* (see note), and the development of the French word itself illustrates the development of mysticism: According to de Certeau it "is a particular case that specifically designates a lexical proliferation in a religious field" (de Certeau 76). The word in French was often used toward the end of the Middle Ages though it appeared then as an adjective and thus "designates an operation to be carried out upon the terms to which it is applied" (de Certeau 76). For example, one has a mystic sense but is not *a mystic*. À la *L'Invention du quotidien* (usage, poaching, tactics, strategy, etc.), de Certeau goes on to examine the development of the term in the Renaissance (emphasis is my own):

[I]t designates **a way of using** and a **way of understanding** the expressions it overdetermines. At first it is an adjective: it is added, as if to designate a specific

¹⁶ The term "mystics" is used by the translator of *La Fable mystique* (Micheal B. Smith) in *The Mystic Fable* (Univ. Chicago, 1992) for Certeau's *la mystique*, which is the nominal form of the adjective *mystique* from which *la mystique* is derived. Certeau covers this derivation at length, and it will be discussed shortly here as well. However, Smith says of his translation of the term:

This term cannot be rendered accurately by the English word 'mysticism,' which would correspond rather to the French *le mysticisme*, and be far too generic and essentialist a term to convey the historical specificity of the subject of this study. There is no need her to trace the [derivation (...)] as that process is reconstructed [by Certeau]. But it may be of some interest to note that this grammatical promotion has its parallel in English, in the development of such terms as 'mathematics' or 'physics,' fields of inquiry of increasing autonomy, also taking their names from an adjectival forerunner. I have, therefore, *in extremis*, adopted the bold solution of introducing a made-up English term, *mystics* (always rendered in italics, to distinguish it from the plural 'a mystic'), to render *la mystique*, a field that might have won (but never did, in English) a name alongside metaphysics, say, or optics.

(de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: Volume One — the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Univ. Chicago Press, 1992, pp. ix-x)

usage, to noun units **already constituted** by language. It designates ‘**ways of doing**’ or ‘**ways of saying**,’ ways of using language. Little by little, these adjectival usages, becoming more complex and more **explicit**, were grouped within a **domain** of their own, their specific designation **identified**, toward the end of the sixteenth century, by the noun form: ‘la mystique.’ The nominal form marked the will to **unify** all these operations, hitherto **dispersed**, that were to be **coordinated**, **selected** (what is truly ‘mystical’?), and **regulated** under the **heading** of a *modus loquendi* (a ‘manner of speaking’). Thus the word no longer modeled itself, as the adjective had done, on the noun units of one sole great (‘biblical’) Narration in order to connote the **many** spiritual **appropriations** or **interiorizations** of the biblical text. It **became a text** itself. It **circumscribed** the elaboration of a **particular** ‘science’ that produced its **discursive** forms, specified its **procedures**, **articulated** its own itineraries or ‘experiences,’ and attempted to **isolate its object**.

(de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 76)

One can see in this passage the reverberations of de Certeau’s cultural theories from his previous book *L’Invention du quotidien*: Over the course of the term’s development (along with the practice of mysticism itself) the term begins as a designation for and in itself as a “way of using,” a tactical poaching of an established language product, i.e., “it is added” “to noun units already constituted by language.” As the development progresses, the usages become more traceable, more “explicit,” and are “grouped within a domain of their own” as “their specific designation [is] identified,” as it is strategically mapped. Once this usage is marked “toward the end of the sixteenth century, by the noun form” “‘la mystique,’” the “hitherto dispersed” usages are categorically unified, “coordinated,” “selected,” and “regulated” under a nominal “heading” — *la mystique*. At this point, once incorporated as a strategic *proper*-ty, the nominal term breaks its connection with the tactical practice of mysticism itself. It becomes a “particular ‘science’” that is “circumscribed” by itself and produces its own “discursive forms,” which are specific and articulated, as it attempts “to isolate its object.” “[A] new discipline [is] born” (de Certeau 76).

However, de Certeau points out that this discipline of *mystics* [*la mystique*] was not destined to last: “Once it had become substantivized into a noun, *mystics* had to determine its

procedures and define its object [though] it succeeded in carrying out the first part of this program, the second part was to prove impossible. Is not its object infinite?” (de Certeau 77). Though mysticism became a discipline designated by a term, it suffered a schism by that strategic designation, for its original object — *in a word*, (notions of) the divine — was destined to remain tactical, to remain a perpetual remainder as de Certeau says: “It is never anything but the unstable metaphor for what is inaccessible....*mystics* only assembles and orders its practices in the name of something that it cannot make into an object (unless it be a mystical one), something that never ceases judging *mystics* as the same time that it eludes it” (de Certeau 77). The effect, effected by the term itself, caused mysticism to finally die “of the question from which it was formed” (de Certeau 77).

Although that is the end of the story of mysticism in that era, an interesting phenomenon was sustained in the interim between then and now according to de Certeau. As the proper science of *mystics* developed into a discipline, the untraced, underground practices of mysticism continued on their own unnoticed trajectories, as they had before the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries:

[T]here has survived a ghost that continues to haunt Western epistemology
[W]e still call what is left of that science in contemporary formations ‘mystical.’¹⁷
This phantom of a passage, repressed during periods secure in their knowledge,
reappears in the gaps within scientific certainty.

(de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 77-78)

These trajectories, these traces, are this dissertation’s focus. Thus, we have arrived at our own object, as it were, *via negativa*, for our concern here is the theologies of those who can be and often are called mystics, who practiced before and after the times with which de Certeau is concerned. Though de Certeau shows the specifics of the epistemologies and theologies of

¹⁷ The French reads: “[N]ous appelons encore ‘mystique’ ce qui s’en trace dans les formations contemporaines” (de Certeau, *La Fable mystique*, Galliamard, 1982, p. 106).

mysticism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we are concerned here with the traces preceding and the remainders following that period of alignment of the “ecstatic” and the “technical” with their respective cultures of the age; however, it was necessary to follow de Certeau’s journey in order to understand the instant in history when the trace of *mystics*, while still intact with its practice, became liminal before becoming marked and in order to be able to heed his warning of “cutting out” and “turning over” mysticism itself. It is here then that our own journey takes a new course to several new negative theologies.

Tracing De Certeau's Remainder

The Biblio-graphy of several Negative Theologies: From the Anonymous to the Pseudonymous to the Posthumous

God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: '*I am* has sent me to you.'"

(Exodus 3:14)

I'm saying that during contemplation, don't have any special relationships. Forget everyone, friend or enemy, family or stranger. To do this work perfectly, you must neglect everything not God.

(*The Cloud of Unknowing*, 63)

He had faith by virtue of the absurd, for all human calculation ceased long ago.

(*Fear and Trembling*, 36)

It is not necessary that you go out of your house. Remain by your table and listen. Do not even listen, only wait. Do not even wait, be completely still and alone. The world will offer itself to you to be unmasked; it cannot do otherwise, in ecstasy it will writhe before you.

(*The Zürau Aphorisms*, Aphorism 109)

Across the centuries and across the globe, a negative theology has been for many the only positive solution for coming to God. The conviction that God is ineffable and unknowable leaves only the option of theological apophasis, coming to know everything God is not in order to recognize what God is. Such a theology forces one who seeks God into the paradox of studying and critiquing intensely everything other than God only ultimately to reject that entire corpus of study and its objects for God.

In the passage from which the above biblical quotation is taken, God commands Moses to tell the Israelites that he will lead them from Egypt, but Moses predicts that the Israelites will not

believe he speaks God's words and will ask instead for God's name. God replies that his name (translated most simply in modern English) is "I am who I am." Unsatisfied, Moses asks for further evidence, and God gives Moses the power to turn his staff to a serpent and back to a staff, to make his hand leprous and then healthy again, and to turn the water of the Nile to blood. The story in Exodus teaches that God cannot divulge his true identity or nature to man in a way that can be understood by man. God can only provide a cryptic name beyond reason and miraculous acts. In the case of Moses's encounter, man cannot know God, only what God does.

Three writers, an anonymous medieval author, Søren Kierkegaard, and Franz Kafka, seek to go beyond Moses's encounter and to provide methods for coming to God *via negativa*. The texts of these authors will first be examined here in and by themselves, followed by how their methods espouse negative theologies that are traces of de Certeau's *la mystique*:

This phantom of a passage, repressed during periods secure in their knowledge, reappears in the gaps within scientific certainty, as if ever returning to its birthplace.¹⁸ At such times it evokes something beyond verifiable or falsifiable systems, an 'inner' strangeness¹⁹ that borrows its form from the faraway regions of the Orient, Islam, and the Middle Ages. In the remote corners of our landscape, this fantastical passerby furnishes the radicalness necessary to those itinerants who flee or lose sight of the institutions that supply knowledge or meaning. Thus, in a thousand and one different ways, all of which recall the 'mystical' turns of the ancient *modus loquendi*, the sayable continues to wound the unsayable.²⁰ A voice comes through the text, a loss transgresses the ascetic order of production, an intense joy or suffering cries out, the sign of death is traced upon the display windows of our acquisitions.²¹ These noises, fragments of strangeness, may again be adjectives, scattered as memories always are, dislocated, but still relating to the substantive figure of the past that furnishes them with the reference point and name of what has disappeared.

(de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 77-78)

¹⁸ The French reads: "il revenait sur les lieux où se répète la scène de sa naissance" (de Certeau, *La Fable mystique*, Gallimard, 1982, p. 106).

¹⁹ The French reads: "étrangeté 'intérieure'" (106).

²⁰ The French reads: "l'énonçable continue d'être blessé par un indicible" (107).

²¹ The French reads: "le trace d'une mort s'écrit sur les vitrines de nos acquisitions" (107).

Anonymous: A Negative Identity

This first trace appropriately comes to us from a nobody, an anonymous — an entity designated only by a (substantivized) adjective. It emerges as one of de Certeau's "fragments of strangeness" from an unspecified milieu. Much of what is known of this author can often only be described in generalities that must be based on analyses of (copies of) the texts he or she produced.²² Each text is philologically examined in search of leads, but this author repeatedly confounds those attempts and virtually disappears "like a thief in the night," concealing his or her identity in order to reveal the Almighty. Here we find an author, who, when contextualized within his or her own work, truly is in need of no outer context yet is constantly made needful of such contextualization by our own desires to know his or her identity.

Scholars continue to wonder about the identity of the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* [*The Clowde of Unknowying*] and *The Book of Privy Counsel* [*The Book of Priue Counseling*].²³ And wondering is generally all one can do, for the author *intentionally* left no concrete evidence of his or her own identity.²⁴ She or he left no evidence even of the texts' original audience other than his or her age (twenty-four),²⁵ as these texts were initially written as addresses to another individual,²⁶ though the books were widely copied and read around England. Since the fifteenth

²² All extant manuscripts of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Book of Privy Counsel* are hand-written copies. Scholars are relatively certain that none of the extant manuscripts were copied directly from an original. (Phyllis Hodgson, *The Cloud and Counselling*, Oxford, 1944, 1-li).

²³ Spellings vary with both titles in editions in Middle English. The titles themselves vary in the various manuscripts.

²⁴ The argument for a purposeful anonymity of the *Cloud*'s author is fairly sound; no extant manuscript (seventeen of *The Cloud*, ten of *Privy Counsel*, several inferior copies, and sundry fragments [Hodgson, *The Cloud and Counselling*, Oxford, 1944, i-xix]) unequivocally bears his or her name or any personally identifiable characteristic, and his or her work was a very popular piece of its time that likely would have sent his or her contemporaries in search of the author.

²⁵ The author addresses the reader as being "now of foure and twenty yere age" (Gallcher [as editor], *The Cloud*, TEAMS, 1997, p. 33).

²⁶ The texts are written in the second person singular throughout.

century,²⁷ some have argued that the author was Walter Hilton (?-1396), a mystic writer from the same era, but that claim has not been proven by any decisive evidence.²⁸ Some have hypothesized that the author was a Carthusian, but again no document can be found showing that the order claimed the work or the author.²⁹ Even the dates of the author's life cannot be clearly determined though most scholars agree that he or she lived in the late fourteenth century: "Since the author seems to have known the work of Richard Rolle [(1290–1349)] and since Walter Hilton seems to have known *him*, the historians conclude that he wrote in the late fourteenth century" (Johnston 4). The exact location of the home of this author is unknown as well, but the general region has been determined as the north part of the central East Midlands of England.³⁰ But why do we search for the authorial context of two books whose theme is the elimination of context and whose author intentionally concealed his or her identity in order to reveal the Lord? Cannot it just suffice to say about the author that he or she was "a caring teacher whom we would all like to meet" (Butcher xvi)? For this discussion, it will.

²⁷ See Phyllis Hodgson's *The Cloud of Unknowing and Related Treatises* (Catholic Records, 1982) ix-x.

²⁸ A note at the top of the fly leaf for one manuscript (*Harleian* 674) containing *The Cloud* and *Privy Counsel* reads: "Richardus Rolles of Ampuls workes (as Mr. Allyn suppose. . . ." (Hodgson, *The Cloud and Counselling*, Oxford, 1944, x). The identity of Mr. Allyn is "[p]erhaps Thomas Allen (1542-1632)" (Hodgson, *The Cloud and Counselling*, Oxford, 1944, x [footnote *]), and Hodgson describes the handwriting as "sixteenth-century" (Hodgson, *The Cloud and Counselling*, Oxford, 1944, x). Another manuscript (*Harleian* 959) has among its pages "*Prey for the wryter Qui nominatur Walterus Fytzherbert*" (Hodgson, *The Cloud and Counselling*, Oxford, 1944, xi).

²⁹ See Phyllis Hodgson's *The Cloud of Unknowing and Related Treatises* (Catholic Records, 1982) x-xi. It is highly likely that the author was either a monk or priest or, at the least, someone closely affiliated with the Church.

³⁰ After a thorough analysis of the phonology, grammar, morphology, and vocabulary of the older manuscripts, Phyllis Hodgson concludes:

The basis of the language in all the manuscripts is that of a [British] East Midland dialect. The very few traces of possible western influence suggest that the district in which *The Cloud* was written was far removed from the western border of the East Midlands. On the other hand, the proportionately small number of Scandinavian words and the fact that these are all common words suggest a district removed from the Scandinavian settlements. The occasional northern terms in [the earliest manuscript], together with the resemblances in vocabulary to other northern and North-Midland texts, support the thesis that [the earliest manuscript] was written in the north part of the central East Midlands.

(Hodgson, *The Cloud and Counselling*, Oxford, 1944, xlix-l)

Some context does need to be given in order to understand the times and traditions in and against which these texts are working.³¹ The first outbreak of the Black Death reached England in 1348 and continued intensely into 1349, followed by intermittent resurgences throughout the rest of the century and thereafter. Also in the fourteenth century, England was at war abroad and within, fighting France in The Hundred Years' War (1337-1453) and fighting with itself in the Peasants' Revolt (1381). The Catholic Church was corrupted by the popes of Avignon (1309-1377), who lived ostentatiously and turned more often to political than ecclesiastical affairs. During this period, or perhaps more because of it, the literature of English mysticism flourished "as never before and never since" (Butcher, Shambala, xv). The context of the traditions of this mysticism stretches back to the late fifth century in which Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, a treatise of whose the *Cloud's* author likely translated, was writing about the search for God *via negativa*, which was continued through the ages in the Western world with such figures as the ninth-century Irish theologian John Scottus Eriugena and the twelfth-century French writer Richard of St. Victor. Writers in this tradition often promoted a knowledge of God through discovering and rejecting all that is not God, which the *Cloud's* author, inspired by those who came before,³² promoted as well.

The Cloud of Unknowing and *The Book of Privy Counsel* are spiritual guidebooks, instruction manuals for prayer. *The Cloud of Unknowing* is divided into seventy-five short chapters, and *The Book of Privy Counsel* is usually divided into approximately twelve to twenty-

³¹ What follows in this paragraph is heavily indebted to Carmen Acevedo Butcher's introduction to *The Cloud of Unknowing with the Book of Privy Counsel* (Shambala Publications, 2009).

³² Phyllis Hodgson says of the author of *The Cloud* and *Privy Counsel* and his or her subject matter:
 Many of his turns of thought and phrase are traceable back to known sources, but in their context they are so vividly personal that one must assume that such borrowed expressions best described his own mental and emotional experiences.
 (Hodgson, *The Cloud and Counselling*, Oxford, 1944, li)

four chapters by editors in various editions. Each chapter deals with an aspect of “contemplation” [*contemplacyon*],³³ the method recommended by the *Cloud*’s author as the true method with which “a soul is united with God” [*a soule is onyd with God* (Gallacher 21)] by God’s love.³⁴ *The Cloud of Unknowing* details the method for coming to contemplation for someone serious about adopting that method and how to begin its practice, while *The Book of Privy Counsel* is a sequel of sorts to *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and as such it concerns perfecting the practice of contemplation.

The way to contemplation is described by *The Cloud*’s author as consisting of four stages: the ordinary [*comoun*], the special [*special*], the singular [*singular*], and the perfect [*parfite*]. The ordinary stage is that of “the ordinary Christian life with your friends out in the world, until God’s eternal love could no longer stand your being so far from him” (*Cloud*, 7). The ordinary stage is the life one leads before God’s calling is heard. In the second, special stage God “nudge[s] your desire awake, fasten[s] it to a leash of longing, and le[ads] you to the next level, so you c[an] be his servant, serving those he loves”³⁵ (*Cloud*, 7-8). In this special stage, a person begins the active life in the church, doing good deeds and serving others. In the singular stage, the Christian travels “[a]long this solitary way” and “learn[s] to lift up the foot of . . . love and walk in kindness towards purity” (*Cloud*, 8). In the singular stage, a person begins to concentrate less on the earthly acts one performs and more on the heavenly acts of

³³ Unless noted otherwise, all citations in Middle English are from the Patrick J. Gallacher edition (TEAMS, 1997). Unless noted otherwise, all citations in Modern English are from the translation *The Cloud of Unknowing* with the *Book of Privy Counsel* by Carmen Acevedo Butcher (Shambala Publications, 2009).

³⁴ Indeed, as Carmen Acevedo Butcher states in her introduction to her translation of *The Cloud of Unknowing* with the *Book of Privy Counsel*: “Contemplation is synonymous with God’s love. It creates interior peace and exterior acts of kindness that Catholics call ‘good works’ and Protestants call ‘service to the Lord’” (Butcher, Shambala Publications, 2009, xvi).

³⁵ The second person is retained in all citations to avoid excessive redaction.

contemplation. The third stage leads into the fourth, the perfect, which is begun on earth and continues in heaven.

Getting to the fourth stage is the focus of the text, which is the stage in which one should focus almost completely on the art of contemplation. The *Cloud*'s author tells his or her reader that the particular contemplation that he promotes is the only true way to begin to know God. However, the problem with knowing God is that he cannot be known through thought, only by love. Anonymous points out that the problem with knowing God through love is that thought and the desire to understand constantly get in the way. Thinking is not only the improper way of coming to know God; it is an incessant obstacle to knowing God. When the author refers to "thinking," he or she means our conception and experience of "'everything in creation'. . .not only the creatures themselves but also everything they do and are, as well as the circumstances in which they find themselves" (*Cloud*, 19). Essentially, the *Cloud*'s author describes a problem of phenomenology: the way we experience and understand our world prevents us from understanding any other; our system for being in the world does not allow us to be outside it. Our desire to experience the world in this way is almost insatiable — so much so that we are not only bound to this particular means of experience but also resist any attempt to alter that experience.

The *Cloud*'s author's solution to this problem is the practice of contemplation:

Forget what you know. Forget everything God made and everybody who exists and everything that's going on in the world, until your thoughts and emotions aren't focused on or reaching towards anything, not in a general way and not in any way in particular. Let them be. For the moment, don't care about anything.
(*The Cloud of Unknowing* with the *Book of Privy Counsel*, 11)

When a person does takes Anonymous's advice, he or she will experience the cloud of unknowing [*the clowde of unknowing*], which "will always be between you and your God, whatever you do." Anonymous writes that will always

keep you from seeing him clearly by the light of understanding in your intellect and will block you from feeling him fully in the sweetness of love in your emotions. So, be sure you make your home in this darkness. Stay there as long as you can, crying out to him over and over again, because you love him. It's the closest you can get to God here on earth, by waiting in this darkness and in this cloud. Work at this diligently, as I've asked you to, and I know God's mercy will lead you there.

(*The Cloud of Unknowing* with the *Book of Privy Counsel*, 12)

As a person continues contemplating in the cloud of unknowing, he or she must have only a "naked intent for God" [*nakid entent unto God*] (*Cloud*, 24).³⁶ For a person to do this in the cloud of unknowing that is between that person and God, he or she must place a cloud of forgetting [*cloude of forgetyng*] between him or herself and creation. In this cloud of forgetting, a person must place everything in creation and everything to do with creation. He or she must "cover it" with this cloud of forgetting. As thoughts come to him or her in contemplation, a person must recognize them and must place them in the cloud of forgetting as well. He or she must focus only on God.

The Book of Privy Counsel takes the art of contemplation even further than *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Beginning at the level of forgetting the world and everything in it and having only a naked intent for God, the author instructs his or her reader not to

let your mazelike mind probe him. Trust that God is God, and let that faith be your foundation . . . [Y]ou reduce your consciousness and emotions to nothing but a . . . blind embracing of your own being.

³⁶ As Carmen Acevedo Butcher points out in her recent translation, this phrase "*nakid entent*" is one of the author's favorite phrases. She observes:

"*Nakid* suggests the humility of a newborn baby, as well as the simplicity of spiritual poverty and even the power of an unsheathed or *nakid* weapon (and the 'power of contemplation'). In other words, *nakid* means "essentially complete or pure, but unadorned and unencumbered" (Butcher, Shambala Publications, 2009, 262).

(*The Cloud of Unknowing with the Book of Privy Counsel*, 172-173)³⁷

This “blind feeling of your own being” [*blynde feling of thine owne beyng*]³⁸ becomes the focus of contemplation at this point; however, the author clarifies how this feeling should be realized:

Here’s what you should do. Go down deep in your mind as far as you can go to its lowest level that some by experience call its ‘highest’ point and think in the simplest (some call it the ‘wisest’) way and realize—not *what you are* but *that you are*.

(*The Cloud of Unknowing with the Book of Privy Counsel*, 177)

Once this feeling is properly realized, Anonymous says that a person should offer it to God. This is the “final” stage of contemplation:

I want to clarify an earlier point here. I know that I said you must forget all things *except* the blind awareness of your naked being; however, what I really meant from the very beginning was something else, something beyond that, something we’ve been working toward together all along, and this is it. Forget yourself entirely *in exchange for* a complete awareness of God’s being. Because of your inexperience, I thought it would be premature of me to expect you—all at once—to suddenly soar up to a spiritual awareness of God’s being, so I’ve been leading you there by degrees.

(*The Cloud of Unknowing with the Book of Privy Counsel*, 201)

The negative theology presented by the anonymous author begins with a recognition of one’s calling to God, then moves to balancing services to fellow men with contemplation of God, then the gradual ceasing of earthly concerns through forgetting, and the gradual increasing of heavenly concerns through contemplation. Contemplation is wholly begun by mentally and/or spiritually seeking God with a “naked intent” that will bring one to a “blind awareness of being,” that a person ultimately surrenders along with the self to God. This negative theology promotes the absolute emptying of the self to a point of isolation that ends in union with God.

³⁷ Carmen Acevedo Butcher’s edition cited here combines *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Book of Privy Counsel* into one volume, *The Cloud of Unknowing with the Book of Privy Counsel* (Shambala Publications, 2009).

³⁸ See Phyllis Hodgson’s *The Cloud of Unknowing and Related Treatises* (Catholic Records Press, 1982, 75).

Pseudonymous: Negating Identity

The next two texts under discussion, *Fear and Trembling: A Dialectical Lyric* [*Frygt og Bæven: Dialektisk Lyrik* (1843)] and *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Edification and Awakening* [*Sygdommen til Døden: En christelig psykologisk Udvikling til Opvækkelse* (1849)], continue the trace, concealed by subterfuge, moved along by an other, a fictive. In small part to ridicule the Hegelian notion of systematic philosophy and in small part to conceal his own identity, Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) wrote many of his texts under different pseudonyms, in large part to allow him to claim that each text presented a different point of view rather than *his* own particular and homogeneous philosophy.³⁹ But Kierkegaard posited an other as author, and in doing so, he removed himself as a referent and placed an empty signifier in his stead. In keeping with this sentiment, Kierkegaard was a radical opponent of Hegelianism and its systemics, of the contemporary bureaucratic and often corrupt state of the Christian Church, especially in his native Denmark where the church was united with the government,⁴⁰ as well as the codified circles of the intellectual elite across Europe; thus, he eluded these systems, changing his hideouts with each new name — Victor Eremita, Johannes de Silentio, Constantin Constantius, Vigilius Haufniensis, Nicolaus Notabene, Hilarius Bogbinder,⁴¹ Johannes Climacus, Inter et Inter, H.H., Anti-Climacus — evading and resisting these networks on a clandestine level.

³⁹ The use of pseudonyms to create diverse points of view is the primary focus of Kierkegaard's *The Point of View for my Work as an Author: A Direct Communication, A Report to History* [*Synspunktet for min Forfatter-Virksomhed: En ligefrem Meddelelse, Rapport til Historien*], written in 1848, published in part in 1851 under Kierkegaard's name, and posthumously published in full in 1859 under his name. Though some of his contemporaries knew or had strong suspicions of the "true" identity of the "author" of his texts and some published their findings, and though Kierkegaard sporadically revealed publically his identity as author of certain texts, this fact does not discount the validity of pseudonymity.

⁴⁰ Kierkegaard's only immediate relative to survive into Kierkegaard's later adulthood, his brother Peter Christian Kierkegaard, was a Lutheran theologian who went on to hold several high positions in the church. He publicly criticized Kierkegaard's opinion of the church on multiple occasions.

⁴¹ One of Kierkegaard's few Germanic pseudonyms, *Bogbinder*, would be "Bookbinder" in English.

Whether he was the true “author” of his text or not, who was he? Søren Aabye Kierkegaard was born in 1813 in Copenhagen, a city in which he would spend most of his life, though it was a life to be closely surrounded by death. He was the youngest of seven children, five of whom predeceased him before they reached the middle of their thirties; his mother died when he was only twenty-one, and his father when he was twenty-five. Kierkegaard’s father was a successful self-made businessman who was intensely religious and encouraged Kierkegaard fervently to obtain a good education. Kierkegaard began a course of study in theology at the University of Copenhagen in 1830; however, he spent much of his time reading literature and philosophy rather than the texts of his discipline. This all changed upon the death of his father, and he passed his theology exams with honors in 1840. He completed and published his dissertation *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates* [*Om Begrebet Ironi med stadigt Hensyn til Socrates*] the following year. After breaking off an engagement with Regine Olsen (1822-1904),⁴² with whom he had had an intense relationship from 1837 to 1841, he began a time of prolific writing, publishing some of his most famous works: *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life, Fear and Trembling: A Dialectical Lyric*, and *Repetition: A Venture in Experimenting Psychology*, all appeared in 1843; followed by *Philosophical Fragments or a Fragment of Philosophy*, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Oriented Reflection on the Dogmatic Problem of Original Sin*, and *Prefaces: Light Reading for Certain Classes as the Occasion may Require* in 1844; *Stages on Life’s Way: Studies by Various Persons* in 1845; and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments: A Mimetic-Pathetic-Dialectic Compilation*, *An Existential Plea* in 1846,⁴³ all of which were published under pseudonyms

⁴² Many scholars have tried to “contextualize” Kierkegaard’s works following this engagement in terms of his personal life, especially *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*.

⁴³ The titles in Danish are respectively: *Enten-Eller: Et Livs-Fragment*; *Frygt og Bæven: Dialektisk Lyrik*; *Gjentagelsen: Et Forsøg i den eksperimenterende Psychologi* (1843); *Philosophiske Smuler eller En Smule*

(some under multiple pseudonymous authors, editors, compilers, and publishers, some with Kierkegaard's name used in the latter three capacities), though he published his mostly lesser known works, his many "*Discourses*" [*Taler*],⁴⁴ under his own name concurrently and throughout the rest of his life. This period of Kierkegaard's publishing was most often concerned with critiquing Hegelianism and its adherents, who moved in the codified circles of elitist intellectualism, which shall be shown in the later discussion of one of its most influential works, *Fear and Trembling*.

After this publishing spree, Kierkegaard apparently considered ceasing to write and becoming a pastor in the countryside. He had received a considerable inheritance from his father that would permit him to do so in comfort, but his plans quickly changed when his writings began to cause controversy. An article by Peder Ludvig Møller appeared that critiqued *Stages on Life's Way* in December 1845. Kierkegaard retaliated by publishing a response under the pseudonym Frater Taciturnus⁴⁵ in which he stated that Møller's only concern in publishing his critique was to appease and impress elitist intellectuals. He followed this article with another that attacked Møller on a personal level. Møller and others struck back at Kierkegaard using the same personal tone. A war of words began that lasted several months, ending with Kierkegaard's becoming determined more than ever to continue with his work and beginning another cycle of prolific writing.

Philosophie; Begrebet Angst: En simpel psykologisk-paapegende Overveelse i Retning af det dogmatiske Problem om Arvesynden; Forord: Morskabslæsning for enkelte Stænder efter Tid og Lejlighed (1844); *Stadier paa Livets Vej: Studier af Forskjellige* (1845); and *Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift til de filosofiske Smuler: Mimisk-pathetisk-dialektisk Sammenskrift, Eksistentielt Indlæg* (1846).

⁴⁴ Though not all of these works appear as "discourses," i.e., with "discourse" or its derivatives in their title in English translation, all of them contain the term "*Tale*" [discourse] or its derivatives in the original Danish.

⁴⁵ Hilarius Bogbinder (see note above) was the pseudonym used for *Stages*.

This second cycle was to become essentially a long critique of the state of the modern Christian Church, especially of the Lutheran state church in Denmark, and a promotion of Kierkegaard's views on religion and faith. Kierkegaard's criticism was that being a Christian had become synonymous with being born in Christendom, i.e., being born in a Christian country, to Christian parents, and being baptized at a Christian Church, and that many who called themselves Christian did not truly understand, much less appreciate, the nature and power of faith itself. Kierkegaard expounded this argument in such notable works as this era as *Edifying Discourses in Diverse Spirits* (1847), *Works of Love: Some Christian Reflections in the Form of Discourses* (1847), both published under his name; and *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Edification and Awakening* (1849), and *Practice in Christianity* (1850), both published pseudonymously.⁴⁶ A further discussion of Kierkegaard's concerns and criticism from this era shall be taken up in the later discussion of *The Sickness Unto Death*.

Interestingly and ironically, this second cycle of Kierkegaard's writing has received its own pseudonym from Kierkegaard Scholars — the “second authorship” — though *he* wrote only four major works out of nineteen under a pseudonym during this time, compared to his first period of publishing, the so-called “first authorship,” in which seven of his fourteen major works were published pseudonymously. Further irony exists in the titles of these periods in the Danish: In the title of the “first authorship” [*Forfatterskabets første del*], “first” [*første*] can mean not only “first” but also (among others) “chief,” “foremost,” and even “only”; whereas, in the “second authorship” [*Forfatterskabets anden del*], “second” [*anden*] can literally mean “other.”⁴⁷ Thus, it is only when Kierkegaard lessens the role that his other (pseudonymous) authors play in

⁴⁶ The titles in Danish are respectively *Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand*, *Kjerlighedens Gjerninger: Nogle christelige Overveielser i Talers Form*, *Sygdommen til Døden: En christelig psychologisk Udvikling til Opvækkelse*, and *Indøvelse i Christendom*.

⁴⁷ Compare the Danish *anden* with its German cognate *ander*, which can mean both “second” and “other” as well.

his works in the “second” authorship that the “other” author is born, and it was the birth of this “other” author that ushered in Kierkegaard’s most vehement attacks upon the Danish church, even unto death, as he refused his last rites after a month-long hospital stay following his collapse in the street from an unknown cause in 1855.

Johannes de Silentio is one of those other authors from Kierkegaard’s first period. This author represents in his book *Fear and Trembling: A Dialectical Lyric* [*Frygt og Bæven. Dialektisk Lyrik*] (1843) one of Kierkegaard’s quintessential attempts to reverse the humanistic ethics of Hegel (and generally of The Enlightenment and its aftermath) to an ethics based on faith and absolute duty to God. Among the many complaints Kierkegaard has about Hegel’s philosophy is that the ethical is the universal, i.e., that all humanity shares a common morality, that all people should act for the common good, and that acting in accordance with the ethical was the greatest end in itself. Kierkegaard also critiques the notion that there was no absolute duty to God and that the individual should act with “disclosure” [*Aabenbarelse*], i.e., an individual’s actions should be explainable to others. One can see this reaction to and negation of Hegelianism as a negative theology in itself, but it served more to lay the foundation for Kierkegaard’s “own” philosophy and negative theology — becoming a knight of faith through the double-movement. Becoming a knight of faith requires one to move through three stages of life. Much like *The Cloud of Unknowing*, *Fear and Trembling* details stages of life but with three instead of four.

The first, the aesthetic⁴⁸ [*aestetisk*] stage,⁴⁹ is the lowest of the three. In this stage, a person is concerned with his or her sensory experience⁵⁰ and his or her relation to the world;

⁴⁸ The term is *esthetic* in some translations.

thus, the person is unaware of the infinitude of God that lies beyond the physical world. It is a stage that allows for individuality but only individuality relative to something else in the world, i.e., the individuality is never absolute and does not allow for a true relationship with God. Furthermore, the aesthete has the power of “concealment”⁵¹ [Skjulested] and thus is able to conceal his or her actions from others, for the aesthete is not obligated to explain them to others, based on the fact that the aesthete’s individuality is constituted aesthetically, by sense perception. This stage is similar to *The Cloud*’s ordinary stage in that a person lives “out in the world, until God’s eternal love could no longer stand your being so far from him,” and in ending that stage, he calls you to the *next* level, in which you “serv[e] those he loves” and “learn to live . . . more spiritually than you did before” (*Cloud*, 7).

The second, the ethical [*ethiske*] stage, is associated with Hegelianism. In this stage, a person is concerned with the universal, i.e., the common experience of mankind and his or her relation to fellow men and women. The individual in the ethical stage acts for the common good of mankind: The ethicist must disclose his or her actions in order to share his or her experiences with others and have theirs shared with him or her, all of which is done in order to maintain a proper and universal morality. There is no absolute duty to God in the ethical stage, only to fellow men and women, and it is the fulfillment of this duty to others that is supposed to bring one closer to God. This stage is strikingly similar to *The Cloud*’s special stage in which God

⁴⁹ The aesthetic “stage on life’s way” was discussed at length prior to *Fear and Trembling* in Kierkegaard’s book published (pseudonymously) earlier in the same year *Either/Or* (1843); hence, it is not as emphasized in the later text as in the earlier.

⁵⁰ Rather than just the common present meaning and connotations of *aesthetic* as a judgement of the beautiful, which Kierkegaard surely intended, it may help to also think of *aesthetic* in its etymological sense: from New Latin *aestheticus*, from Greek *aisthētikos* “of sense perception,” from Greek *aisthanesthai* “to perceive.”

⁵¹ The term is also translated as “hiddenness.” The original Danish *skjulsted* is a combination of *skjule* “to hide” and *sted* “stead” or “place,” thus essentially “hiding-place.”

“nudge[s] your desire awake, fasten[s] it to a leash of longing, and le[ads] you to the next level, so you c[an] be his servant, serving those he loves” (*Cloud*, 7-8).

The final stage, the religious [*religieuse*], is the highest of the three. A person in the religious stage is always moving towards an “absolute relation to the absolute,” i.e., the individual can eventually develop a solitary, absolute relationship with God. The individual in the religious stage sustains individuality through that relationship to God and not to the world or to others. In this stage, the individual is allowed concealment and is not required to disclose action, for this individual need not explain his or her action to anyone or in relation to anything other than the duty to God. This stage is strikingly similar to *The Cloud*’s singular stage in which you travel “[a]long this solitary way” and “learn to lift up the foot of your love and walk in kindness towards purity” (*Cloud*, 10). Kierkegaard provides several examples of each of these stages in his “Eulogy on Abraham” in *Fear and Trembling* (the bracketed terms are my own):

He who loved himself became great by virtue of himself [aesthetic], and he who loved other men became great by his devotedness [ethical], but who loved God became the greatest of all [religious]. . . . One became great by expecting the possible [aesthetic], another by expecting the eternal [ethical]; but he who expected the impossible became the greatest of all [religious]. . . . [h]e who struggled with the world became great by conquering the world [aesthetic], and he who struggled with himself became great by conquering himself [ethical], but he who struggled with God became greatest of all [religious]. . . . [t]here was one who relied upon himself and gained everything [aesthetic]; there was one who in the security of his own strength sacrificed everything [ethical]; but the one who believed in God was the greatest of all [religious].

(Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 16)

Arguably, Kierkegaard may have envisioned a stage comparable to *The Cloud*’s perfect stage, but like the anonymous author, believed it only *fully* attainable in the afterlife and hence

not worth discussing in a text that was already as burdened as *Fear and Trembling*.⁵² Thus, we return to further exploration of the latter two stages.

In the religious stage, an individual becomes a “knight of faith” [*Troens Ridder*] by performing the “double-movement” [*Dobbelt-Bevægelse*]. The first part of the double-movement consists of the individual giving up everything and everyone dear to him or her and then resigning his or her self to that fate by coming to terms with that fate. Kierkegaard argues that many individuals stop at this point and become “knights of infinite resignation” [*Ridderne af uendelige Resignation*] and that our cultures have come to laud these individuals as tragic heroes (such as Oedipus, Hamlet, etc.). However, Kierkegaard maintains that it is always better to go beyond this point to the second part of the double-movement in which the individual makes the famous leap to faith and has everything that was given up in the first movement returned by virtue of the absurd [*Kraft af det Absurde*]. In the double-movement, the individual abandons the world and any of its ethical or rational systems and has faith that the absurd, the irrational realm of possibility that cannot be known (i.e. God), will return all that was lost. Kierkegaard uses the story of Abraham’s attempted sacrifice of his son Isaac, an episode he discusses at length in the book, as an example of the double-movement:

He climbed the mountain, and even in the moment when the knife gleamed he had faith—that God would not require Isaac. No doubt he was surprised at the outcome, but through a double-movement he had attained his first condition, and therefore received Isaac more joyfully than the first time....Abraham had faith. He did not have faith that he would be blessed in a future life but that he would be blessed here in the world. God could give him a new Isaac, could restore to life the one sacrificed. He had faith by virtue of the absurd, for all human calculation ceased long ago.

(Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 36)

⁵²Anonymous states in the first chapter of *The Cloud*: “You can begin and complete the first three stages in this earthly life. Grace will help start the fourth here also, but it will last forever in the heavenly joy of eternity.” (Butcher [as translator], *The Cloud of Unknowing with The Book of Privy Counsel*, Trans. Butcher, Shambala, 2009, p. 7).

Much like the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Book of Privy Counsel*, Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling* promotes a negative theology that requires one to surrender all that one has and knows in order to be rewarded with an experience that is unfathomable and with a new miraculous faith. The process of surrendering in both Kierkegaard's text and Anonymous's requires an abandonment of the world and everything in it to gain this faith.

Kierkegaard continues his discussion of faith during his "second authorship" in *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian psychological Exposition for Edification and Awakening* [*Sygdommen til Døden: En christelig psykologisk Udvikling til Opvækkelse*] (1849), albeit with a different focus and viewpoint, which is complemented by another pseudonym, Anti-Climacus, though Kierkegaard is credited as having edited [*Udgivet*] the book. The primary concern of this text is the problem of despair [*Fortvivlelse*], the sickness unto death, to which faith is the solution. Kierkegaard describes despair as a condition that all humans are born with though they do not necessarily ever come to realize it. Despair, in simplest terms, is an unbalanced self; however, Kierkegaard's definition of the human self is incredibly complicated, especially since it is communicated in *The Sickness Unto Death* in a manner that parodies Hegelianism, most directly the concept of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis:

The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself. A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis.⁵³

⁵³ The Danish reads:

"Selvet er et Forhold, der forholder sig til sig selv, eller er det i Forholdet, at Forholdet forholder sig til sig selv; Selvet er ikke Forholdet, men at Forholdet forholder sig til sig selv. Mennesket er en Synthese af Uendelighed og Engedlighed, af det Timelige og det Evige, af Frihed og Nødvendighed, kort en Synthese"

(Kierkegaard, *Sygdommen til Døden*, 173).

Several elements of the Danish cannot be rendered in English: The sound and sight of the repetition of "self" [*Selv/selv*] and "itself" [*sig*] is not as strong or as frequent as it is in the translation; furthermore, the Danish *sig* can mean both "it" and "itself," and Kierkegaard uses *sig* and an emphatic *sig selv* that cannot be emphasized in English

(Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 13)

On one hand, the self is in part the actual act of the relating [*Forhold*] of opposites in a synthesis, such as the spiritual and the physical, and not the relationship itself. In essence, à la Heidegger, the self selfs. On the other hand, that actual act of relating also relates to what is being related and, more importantly, to its own act of relating. The latter relating of the act of relating to the act of relating is the self. But the self is never a static or stable self: It is in constant tension and flux, or in Kierkegaard's terms, it is constantly in a state of "becoming" [*Udvikling*].⁵⁴

Kierkegaard continues his discussion of the self by probing its origin: "Such a relation that relates itself to itself, a self, must either have established itself or have been established by another" (Kierkegaard 13). Kierkegaard quickly dismisses the notion of a self-constituted self, and rather briskly moves on to a discussion of a self constituted by another. The self constituted by another has an act of relating to that other, which in turn relates to that act: "The human self is such a derived, established relation, a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another" (Kierkegaard 13-14).

Despair is the imbalance of the acts of the relating of the self to itself and thereby to another: "the self [cannot] arrive at or [...] be in equilibrium and rest by itself, but only, in relating itself to itself, by relating itself to that which established the entire relation" (Kierkegaard 14). The total absence of despair would entail a perfect balance among the relations attained by the self willing itself to be the self perfectly related to the other, which

because *sig* must be rendered in this passage as "itself," leaving no option to emphasize *sig selv*. Compounding that complication, Kierkegaard makes the distinction between "self" as a pronoun [*selv*] and as a noun [*Selv*], for at this time in the Danish language, nouns were still capitalized. Moreover, the symmetry of the phrase "itself to itself" [*sig til sig selv*] does not appear in the Danish, allowing the latter "itself" [*sig selv*] the appearance of different self, as it were, than the former "itself" [*sig*], which is also the case in the distinction between the pronoun and noun form of "self" in the Danish.

⁵⁴ *Udvikling* could also be translated as "developing," for the meanings of their morphemes of their derivations are similar, literally "to unwrap." Compare the cognate of the Danish in the German *Entwicklung*.

constitutes the whole relation, the “power” [*Magt*]: “The formula that describes the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out is this: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be oneself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it” (Kierkegaard 14).⁵⁵

After the constitution of the self is “explained,” the remainder of *The Sickness Unto Death* details the many classifications of despair, distinguished mainly by the level of awareness of sin and despair, the imbalance between finitude and infinitude and between necessity and possibility, and what one does about that awareness of imbalances. But the concern here is Kierkegaard’s notion of a negative theology, and not the gradations of despair over the self. The theology promoted in *The Sickness Unto Death* is negative in that the process that brings one to God requires the recognition of all that is sinful before God, i.e., the relations of the self to the physical and spiritual world that are not in accord with the relation to the self that God envisions (which ultimately causes an infinitely compounding despair) and then the rejection of them. In other words, the self must will itself to be the “proper” self and must *want* to do so (the self must not be in despair over wanting to will itself). Willing the proper self requires being content with the self that God makes one into through the relations; however, one can only become conscious of an “improper” self through despair, not a proper self, and life is a continuous struggle to root out the despair that causes one to be the self one shouldn’t be or that causes one to want to be

⁵⁵ Compare Anonymous’s notions of the contemplative spiritual self resting in the power that nourishes it:

When we’re asleep, the functions of our physical faculties are suspended so our bodies can get complete rest. Sleep nourishes and strengthens our bodies in every way. The same is true of the spiritual ‘sleep’ of contemplative prayer. The stubborn questions of our restless spirituality and of all our creative and rational thoughts are firmly bound and totally emptied, so the happy soul can sleep soundly, resting profoundly in the loving awareness of God as he is, completely nourished and strengthened in spirit.

(Butcher [as translator], *The Cloud of Unknowing with the Book of Privy Counsel*, Shambala Publications, 2009, 196)

another self. Essentially, one does not have to be happy with one's circumstances, but rather one must be happy with the self in those circumstances.⁵⁶

Posthumous: A Remainder

The final text under discussion, *The Zürau Aphorisms*, brings the trace to a vanishing point beyond which its trajectory continues into the absolutely unknowable, left unfinished and indeterminate, its departure marked only by a gravestone and a literary estate that was to be erased. This text is an untitled, unfinished, posthumously published collection of one hundred and fourteen aphorisms written between 1918 and 1921 by the Austrian Modernist author of fiction Franz Kafka after his diagnosis with tuberculosis and during his convalescent stays with his sister in the small Bohemian village of Zürau, hence the posthumous title.

Kafka was born in 1883 in Prague, the capital of Bohemia within the Austrian Empire. His father, Hermann Kafka, was an austere businessman who ran a high end goods store with his wife, Julie (née Löwy) in downtown Prague, just around the corner from the city's famed Astronomical Clock. Kafka was the eldest of six children. His two brothers did not survive past infancy, but Kafka enjoyed a strong relationship with his sisters, especially Ottilie (Ottla), in spite of his troubling relationship with his overbearing father and his withdrawn mother, though the latter was troubling to a lesser extent.

Though of Jewish heritage, Kafka did not actively practice his faith until much later in life. Believing that the German language would offer the best opportunities for his children, Kafka's father required German be used in Kafka's home rather than Yiddish or Czech, though

⁵⁶ Kierkegaard could be ironically undermining his pseudo-Hegelian system with his choice of words, for though it is unapparent in translations, the word for "relation" [*Forhold*] that Kierkegaard uses repeatedly can also mean "condition," "situation," and "circumstance." Such a double-entendre allows for the possibility that one must want to will a self that is in accord with the world too.

Kafka was fluent in Czech from an early age and learned Yiddish and to a lesser extent French later in life. Kafka's primary and secondary schooling was all in German, and he was accepted to the Charles-Ferdinand University in Prague, where he began his studies in Chemistry, only to change to Law after just two weeks because it would offer a longer course of study and thus more time to take classes in the Arts, which interested Kafka most, and it would provide a broad field of employment opportunities. Kafka graduated with a doctorate in Jurisprudence and began a relatively successful career in the insurance industry, a livelihood that would allow him ample time for his passion, or perhaps better described, his obsession — writing.

Though Kafka likely began writing at a very early age, an intense self-critic, he destroyed all of his work written before 1903. Kafka wrote several short works between 1904 and 1912, which were collected into his first publication beyond periodicals, *Betrachtung* [*Contemplation*], in 1913, but it was his writings from 1912 through 1917 that would garner him the most success during his lifetime, including “Das Urteil” [The Judgment] (1913), “Der Heizer” [“The Stoker”] (1913), “Die Verwandlung” [“The Metamorphosis”] (1915), “In der Strafkolonie” [“In the Penal Colony”] (1919),⁵⁷ and “Ein Landarzt” [“A Country Doctor”] (1919).⁵⁸ However, a turn of events in the latter half of 1917 would cause Kafka to take a hiatus from fiction proper in favor of the mystical.

On September 4th, 1917 at the age of 34, Kafka was diagnosed with catarrh in the lungs and serious danger of developing tuberculosis, the disease that took his life almost seven years later. Following the advice of his doctor to move to the country, on September 12th Kafka took an extended leave of absence from his job at a semi-governmental workers' accident insurance firm in Prague and moved in with his sister Ottla in her home in a small village then called Zürau

⁵⁷ “In der Strafkolonie” was written in 1914.

⁵⁸ “Ein Landarzt” was written in 1916-1917.

(now Sřem) in the northwest of the present Czech Republic. Over the next five months, from October 1917 to February 1918, Kafka composed the majority of what are now commonly called *The Zřrau Aphorisms*.

As shown above, we know a substantial amount about Kafka's life; thus, there is no great need to go in search of a biography via his texts, as there is in the cases of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Book of Privy Counsel*, and those works have been dissected to the smallest linguistic and stylistic details in search of their author. However, Kafka's text presents us with an entirely different sort of problem, though perhaps just as "controversial" in our postmodern era — authorial intent. What follows here will be an anatomy of Kafka's *Zřrau Aphorisms* in search of not only its composition but also its ends, which, as with *Cloud* and *Counsel*, will result in only a nebulous milieu.

The aphorisms were first written in two octavo notebooks. Though the notebooks consist primarily of aphorisms, short and sporadic diaristic entries can be found in them as well, but these entries, unlike the deep introspective reflections of Kafka's other diaries, are instead only terse remarks about places he visited, current events, and his daily emotional status. In late February of 1918, prior to or just after coming back to Prague, Kafka returned to these two notebooks and selected and edited one hundred and six aphorisms into a fair copy.⁵⁹ He wrote each aphorism in the fair copy on a separate numbered sheet of paper, except for one aphorism (39a) that was written on the verso side of the page of another aphorism. Kafka began assembling this fair copy before he composed the final aphorisms of the collection, and he

⁵⁹ The history of the composition of the aphoristic collection given here is based largely on evidence presented by the editors of the *Apparatband* (pp. 48-53) to Kafka's *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente II* (Schocken, 1992), which was published as the critical edition of Kafka's works, and by Max Brod in his biography of Kafka (*Über Franz Kafka*, Fischer, 1946). Other scholarly sources, many of which were published prior to the critical edition, contradict the history given here; however, the critical edition is the most recent detailed account of *The Zřrau Aphorisms* and is based on years of study of the oeuvre of Kafka's original manuscripts.

finished assembling it before the end of that February in 1918. In the fall of 1920, Kafka returned to the fair copy and added eight new aphorisms to his collection. He wrote each new aphorism on the recto side of the same page of another aphorism from the original one hundred and six, dividing the two on each page with a horizontal line. The additional aphorisms were added to original aphorisms throughout the collection. The significance and relation of the original aphorisms to the additional one is entirely open to speculation. The addition of the new aphorisms brought the total number of aphorisms to one hundred and fourteen, though there are only one hundred and five sheets of paper in the collection and the numbering ends at one hundred and nine. This is so for several reasons: three pages have a single aphorism under two numbers (8/9, 11/12, 70/71), there are no pages numbered 65 or 89, and there is one page numbered 39 on its recto side and 39a on its verso side. After copying the aphorisms from the notebooks onto separate sheets of paper, Kafka also struck through twenty-three of the aphorisms in the collection; however, he struck them through using a pencil whereas the aphorisms were written in pen, which would allow him easily to erase the strikethrough without ruining the aphorisms. The entire collection, including those that were struck through, was copied into a typescript in the late fall of 1920 by someone other than Kafka. Those aphorisms that were struck through were marked with “xx” in the margins of the typescript. The aphorisms were left in this state by the author.

Scholars cannot ascertain with full certainty the intentions informing Kafka’s composing, editing, numbering, and deleting of these aphorisms. Thus, like the aphoristic form itself, this collection of aphorisms resists contextualization to a certain degree. But as is the case with many of Kafka’s works that were left unfinished, there is enough evidence for one to reach reasonable conclusions about the intentions that inform this work, though this collection of

aphorisms may present more complications for reaching such conclusions than some of Kafka's other works.

A scholar can easily argue that Kafka planned to publish this collection of aphorisms at some point, though to ascertain why he did not do so is probably impossible. The facts that a fair copy was made and that the aphorisms were copied into type show that the collection was in at least a preliminary stage of preparation for publication. One must also consider the mental labor involved in the process of selecting the aphorisms in the collection from the more than three hundred entries in the one hundred and forty pages (seventy leaves) of the two notebooks, the physical labor of copying them by hand, the expense of the paper and ink at that time, and the fact that the modest and self-critical Kafka allowed someone else to read his work in its presumably unfinished state while he or she typed it. Furthermore, the fact that the aphorisms were numbered indicates that Kafka was generally keeping track of how many aphorisms were in the collection and may have intended that the collection ultimately consist of an even one hundred aphorisms; however, the methodology of numbering the aphorisms is one of the most troubling aspects of reaching conclusions of the final reasoning behind the assemblage of the collection.

The one hundred and six aphorisms written from October 9th, 1917 to February 26th, 1918 were extracted and placed sometime in February of 1918 on the numbered sheets of paper in the order in which they appear in the notebooks, which is chronological. Three of the aphorisms are on single pages numbered with two consecutive numbers, pages 65 and 89 are not in the collection, and there is a recto 39 and verso 39a. The reader can conclude, however, that those aphorisms with two numbers are so numbered in order to indicate that for each aphorism an additional aphorism is needed that is similar in theme, style, or some other characteristic to the

one with two numbers, and that once the new aphorism was written, it would take as its number one of the numbers from the aphorism that has two numbers. This is supported by the fact that in each case Kafka wrote the first number of the two numbers before he copied the aphorism and added the second number after he finished writing the aphorism. Thus, one can deduce that Kafka first considered the aphorism while copying it or some time thereafter; decided another like it was needed; and then added the second number as a placeholder for a later composition. The missing numbers 65 and 89 could indicate places where aphorisms that are dissimilar in theme, style, etc. to the ones surrounding them are needed. It follows then that Kafka may have originally composed aphorisms 65 and 89 in the notebooks, copied them into the fair copy, but upon reconsideration disliked them so much that he removed them completely from the collection, and left their spaces to be filled in at a later time.⁶⁰ The reader can postulate that Aphorisms 39 and 39a were meant to be two alternatives for a single aphorism, and that one of them would be deleted, which is arguably the case with aphorism 39a, for it was indeed struck through. Further evidence to support the claim that 39 and 39a are alternatives for a single aphorism is the fact that they share a similar theme in abstraction though they appear unrelated when read literally:

39. *Dem Bösen kann man nicht in Raten zahlen – und versucht es unaufhörlich.*

39. One cannot pay Evil in installments – and it is tried incessantly.

39a. *Der Weg ist unendlich, da ist nichts abzuziehen, nichts zuzugeben und doch hält doch [sic]⁶¹ jeder noch seine eigene kindliche Elle daran. „Gewiß auch diese Elle Wegs mußst Du noch gehn, es wird Dir nicht vergessen werden.“*

⁶⁰ Kafka generally struck through those aphorisms in the notebooks that were not used in the fair copy and did not strike through those that were to be used in the fair copy; however, there are exceptions to this case. It is possible that aphorisms 65 and 89 may be present in the notebooks and may be found by their position between the original versions of those aphorisms that would surround them in the collection and by their lacking strikethrough. The critical edition of Kafka's works does not indicate which entries were struck through in the notebooks, and I have not had access to the manuscripts themselves.

⁶¹ The superfluous second *doch* of 39a is believed to be a proofing error on Kafka's part.

39a. The Way is unending, since there is nothing to subtract from it, nothing to add to it, and still though each holds his own childish yardstick to it. “Certainly you must still go this yard of the Way also; it will not be forgotten of you.”⁶²

Both aphorisms share the theme of the indivisibility of a whole, the disregard of that indivisibility by man, and the ultimate proof of the whole’s indivisibility via that very disregard. In aphorisms 39, a person cannot divide his payment to Evil into installments, but he tries to do so incessantly, without a stop. Thus his attempt to divide payment into installments leads to one continuous installment and thus proves that one cannot pay Evil in divided installments. In aphorism 39a the Way is said to have no end because portions cannot be subtracted or added to it; nonetheless, each person tries to divide the Way into yards by “holding his childish yardstick to it,” but this division only leads to the conclusion that there is still always more of the Way to go, for ““certainly you must still go this yard of the Way; it will not be forgotten of you,”” and thus the Way is unending. The fact that 39a was struck through with pencil may indicate that Kafka was planning on deleting it and using 39 in the final collection and that he did not entirely delete 39a in case he changed his mind or found another place for it. It seems likely that Kafka had the same attitude toward the other twenty-two aphorisms that he struck through in pencil as well.

Here ends the reader’s anatomy lesson, appropriately with speculation and indeterminacy. Here begins a theology lesson, appropriately with more of the same.

Like Kierkegaard, Kafka’s texts present multiple points of view; however, the reader can find at least one hundred and fourteen different points of view in this single “text,” a fact to which aphorism 72 alludes:

⁶² All aphorisms hereafter are cited from the critical edition of Kafka’s oeuvre, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente Vol. II* (Schocken, 1992) pp. 113-140. The number of each aphorism is given rather than the page number. All translations are my own.

72. *Es gibt im gleichen Menschen Erkenntnisse, die bei völliger Verschiedenheit doch das gleiche Objekt haben, sodaß wieder auf verschiedene Subjekte im gleichen Menschen rückgeschlossen werden muß.*

72. There are in the same person insights, which differ completely but still have the same object, so that it must be inferred that there are different subjects in the same person.

The Zürau Aphorisms are about as far away from a systematic philosophy as possible; in fact, each aphorism was copied from Kafka's notebooks onto separate numbered sheets of paper and appears in the chronological order that he originally drafted them. The subject matter, tone, style, and length vary drastically among the aphorisms, and Kafka left no preface or introduction to them, nor did he indicate the particular importance of any one aphorism. He did not even title the collection. Though holistic interpretations of this collection of aphorisms have been attempted,⁶³ a thorough analysis and interpretation of the entire collection would be a tedious affair best reserved to a book-length study devoted entirely to that collection, so a discussion of a few of the aphorisms individually must suffice, without necessarily applying any one particular interpretive strategy, which is appropriate to such a work as Kafka's that is by its very nature fragmentary, presenting what could be called one hundred and fourteen separate texts, with each possibly providing commentary on and often contradicting the others. The aphorisms discussed here are ones whose subject matter relates (or at least appears to relate) to a negative theology and which allude thematically to Kierkegaard and/or the anonymous author of *The Cloud*,⁶⁴ beginning with aphorism 27:

⁶³ See Werner R. Hoffmann's *Kafkas Aphorismen* (Francke, 1975) and "Ansturm gegen die letzte irdische Grenze": *Aphorismen und Spätwerk Kafkas* (Francke, 1984), Richard T. Gray's *Constructive Destruction: Kafka's Aphorism: Literary Tradition and Literary Transformation* (Niemeyer, 1987), and my Master's thesis: *Finding and Following the True Way: Franz Kafka's Zürau Aphorisms* (2007).

⁶⁴ It is well-documented in Kafka's diaries and biographies that Kafka not only read Kierkegaard but admired him greatly; however, there is no evidence to suggest that he ever read any works by the anonymous author of *The Cloud*.

54. *Es gibts nichts anderes als eine geistige Welt; was wir sinnliche Welt nennen ist das Böse in der geistigen und was wir böse nennen ist nur eine Notwendigkeit eines Augenblicks unserer ewigen Entwicklung.*

54. There is nothing other than a spiritual world; what we call the phenomenal world is the evil in the spiritual world, and what we say is evil is only the necessity of a moment in our eternal development.

In aphorism 54, Kafka states that “[t]here is nothing other than a spiritual world”: That there is nothing beyond the spiritual [*geistige*] world and that the spiritual world does not contain another world. The world we experience as humans, the phenomenal [*sinnliche*] world, is the true evil [*Böse*] in the spiritual world, for that which we took as evil is actually the “necessity [*Notwendigkeit*] of a moment in our eternal development,” i.e., the false evil [*böse*]⁶⁵ is the need of an instant for us to undergo growth.

When the reader considers aphorism 54 in the context of a negative theology, it becomes clear that we as humans already exist in the spiritual world and hence are not separated from it or God by any boundary other than our phenomenology and the limit of our epistemology. What prevents our experiencing the spiritual world is our belief that a phenomenal world exists apart from the spiritual and that the phenomenal world is the only world we can experience — when we should actually be rejecting the evil phenomenal world for the spiritual. What we say is evil, that which affects us negatively or causes negative events, is actually necessary to our development, for it encourages us to see the phenomenal world in that “moment” as a negative and hence something to be rejected.

Never one to pass up the opportunity for irony or contradiction, Kafka argues in aphorism 57 below that language cannot be used to truly describe anything other than the phenomenal world, but, of course, we must use language to indicate such a fact:

⁶⁵ The *b* of the second word for “evil” in the original German is lower-case, indicating that it is an adjective instead of a noun.

57. Die Sprache kann für alles außerhalb der sinnlichen Welt nur andeutungsweise, aber niemals auch nur annähernd vergleichsweise gebraucht werden, da sie entsprechend der sinnlichen Welt nur vom Besitz und seinen Beziehungen handelt.

57. For everything outside the phenomenal world, language can be used only in a way that suggests but never in a way that even approaches comparison, since by its corresponding to the phenomenal world, it is concerned only with possession and the relations of possession.

Language can describe our relation only to the phenomenal world and the relations among the phenomenal world, and as such language is useless for negating the phenomenal, for every usage only recalls the phenomenal. Language cannot describe the spiritual world because of its dependence on comparison, on the relations. Language lacks this ability because, as has been indicated by the anonymous and pseudonymous, coming into contact with the spiritual requires the relinquishing of all relations. However, our only method of communicating this lacking ability of language to each other — language itself — is proved impotent, and we must withdraw into solitude in order to pursue the spiritual within us, a point that Kafka makes in aphorism 77:

77. Verkehr mit Menschen verführt zur Selbstbeobachtung.

77. Communication with others leads to self-observation.

This irony of the simultaneous impotence and potency of communication is further expanded in the last aphorism that will be discussed here, aphorism 106, which is remarkably similar to Kierkegaard's definition of the self:

106. Die Demut gibt jedem, auch dem einsam Verzweifelnden das stärkste Verhältnis zum Mitmenschen und zwar sofort, allerdings nur bei völliger und dauernder Demut. Sie kann das deshalb, weil sie die wahre Gebetsprache ist, gleichzeitig Anbetung und festeste Verbindung. Das Verhältnis zum Mitmenschen ist das Verhältnis des Gebetes, das Verhältnis zu sich das Verhältnis des Strebens; aus dem Gebet wird die Kraft für das Streben geholt.

106. Humility gives to each, even to him alone in despair, the strongest relationship to fellow people and surely is it given immediately, though obviously only with complete and continuous humility. It can do this because it is the true

language of prayer, simultaneously worship and the most solid unity. The relationship to fellow people is the relationship of prayer, the relationship to oneself is the relationship of striving; out of prayer the strength for the striving is gotten.

A diagram will aid in the interpretation of this aphorism:

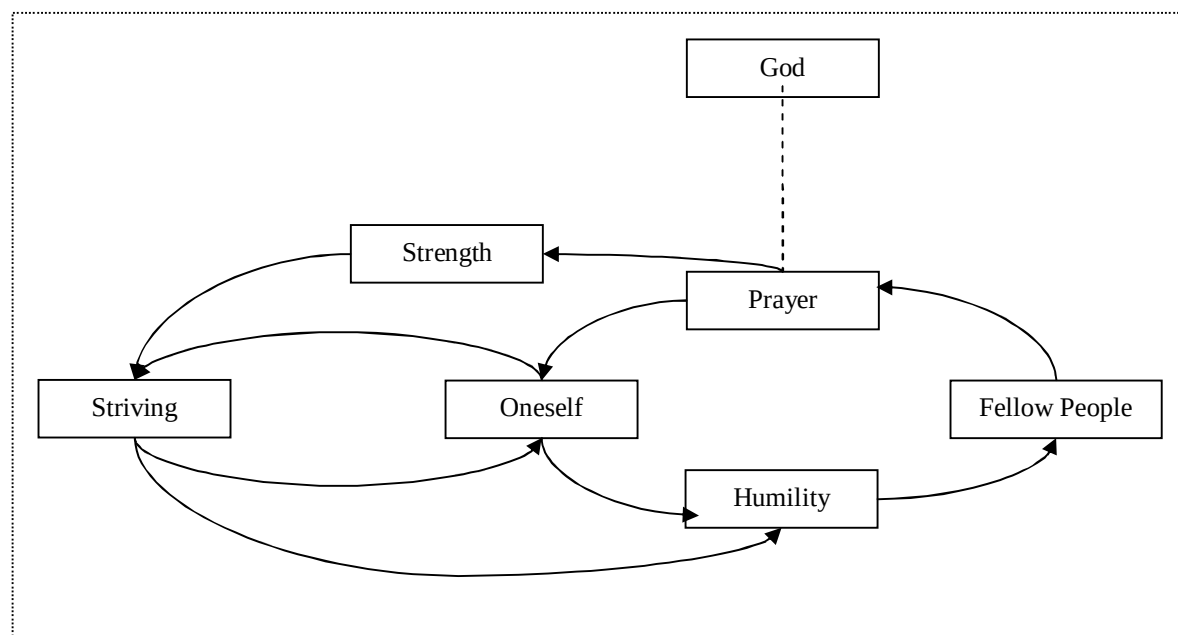


Figure 1: Aphorism 106

Humility, the purposeful denial of the will to communicate one's desires to or impose one's will on others, gives the individual (even one in the deepest *despair*)⁶⁶ the strongest relationship to fellow people, which is also a relationship of prayer. However, in order to maintain this strongest of relationships with fellow people, one must strive to maintain this humility. In addition, this striving for humility is a relationship to one's self, but the strength to maintain this striving for humility is attained through prayer.

God, the appropriately unnamed other in the aphorism, is communicated with through prayer; hence, much like Kierkegaard's self, Kafka's self is constituted by another. Furthermore,

⁶⁶ *Verzweifelden*, the word I translate as "despair," is cognate with Kierkegaard's *Fortvivlelse*, as *Verhältnis*, the word I translate as "relationship," is with Kierkegaard's *Forhold*.

it is the denial of communication with other people that empowers the self to communicate with God through prayer, which in turn empowers the self to continue being humble, and so on.

The negative “theology” presented by Kafka in *The Zürau Aphorisms* is once again a process of recognizing what is worldly and all mental activity connected to what is worldly and negating them. The negation of the world leads to absolute isolation mainly in the form of the denial of communication and the denial of the validity of our experiences, and this process of negation appears to be the task of man.

England’s Anonymous, Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous, and Kafka’s posthumous works depict the individual in an existence of total irony, for one comes to know a world, which is experienced every second of every day, that must be negated. For Anonymous, this negation brings one to know one’s essential *being*, which is then surrendered to God in exchange for awareness of God’s *being*. In the pseudonymous works of Kierkegaard, this negation requires becoming the self that God wants each person to be and relinquishing all that one desires, only to have it returned along with a stronger, better faith. In the posthumous work of Kafka, this negation requires enduring the irony of an impotent language and rejecting the phenomenal world in exchange for the spiritual.

The reader must wonder, if a negative theology is the only positive form of existence, what world was man originally *meant* to live in? Were we not meant to remain in Paradise? Original sin now seems all the more mysterious and all the more burdensome, for each individual is put to the task of not necessarily gaining redemption for that sin but rather undoing everything that has happened and that has become since the Fall. The only way to overcome the irony of our existence is to live in paradox: the purpose of our earthly existence is its negation; we share a common experience that constructs our world, but it is only isolation from that world that truly

brings us to the spiritual beyond that world. We live to be alone with Nothing, which is also to live together with God.

The *Je ne Sais quoi* of *Savoir Faire* — A Know-How for Knowing God

Knowing by Being Unknown

The operational models of popular culture cannot be confined to the past, the countryside, or primitive peoples. They exist in the heart of the strongholds of the contemporary economy. Take, for example, what in France is called *la perruque*, ‘the wig.’⁶⁷ *La perruque* is the worker’s own work disguised as work for his employer. It differs from pilfering in that nothing of material value is stolen. It differs from absenteeism in that the worker is officially on the job. *La perruque* may be as simple a matter as a secretary’s writing a love letter on ‘company time’ or as complex as a cabinetmaker’s ‘borrowing’ a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room. Under different names in different countries this phenomenon is becoming more and more general, even if managers penalize it or ‘turn a blind eye’ on it in order not to know about it. Accused of stealing or turning material to his own ends and using the machines for his own profit, the worker who indulges in *la perruque* actually diverts time (not goods, since he uses only scraps) from the factory for work that is free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit. In the very place where the machine he must serve reigns supreme, he cunningly takes pleasure in finding a way to create gratuitous products whose sole purpose is to signify his own capabilities through his *work* [*signifier par son œuvre un savoir-faire propre*] and to confirm his solidarity with other workers or his family through *spending* his time in this way. With the complicity of other workers (who thus defeat the competition the factory tries to instill among them), he succeeds in ‘putting one over’ on the established order on its home ground. Far from being a regression toward a mode of production organized around artisans or individuals, *la perruque* reintroduces ‘popular’ techniques [*tactiques*] of other times and other places into the industrial space (that is, into the Present order).

(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 26-27)

La perruque is a specific example, within the category of tactics, of individuals manipulating a strategic system, not so much to subvert or undermine that system, but to create products that show others his or her particular tactical *know-how* and therewith his or her bond to others as

⁶⁷ In his translation of *L’Invention du quotidien, The Practice of Everyday Life* (Univ. Cali. Press 1984), Steven Rendall provides explanations and examples of the meanings of the idiomatic usage of *la perruque* that do not appear in de Certeau’s French (*L’Invention du quotidien*, Union Générale, 1980, p. 70). These explanations and examples appear in the above quotation after the superscript and before the sentence beginning with “Under different names in different countries. . . .”

fellow people within the same system, a system which would normally have them vying against each other for betterment and/or structure them in a hierarchy that signifies that apparent betterment. A person who “dons the peruke”⁶⁸ becomes a figurative straw boss,⁶⁹ who, though not officially designated as a leader by a “manager” nor chosen by his equals to head their union, steps out of line and shows others by his or her example how to make do with the materials at hand in their circumstances, and by doing so, she or he brings the others into a collectivity that cannot be mapped by a (strategic) managerial system or even specifically plotted by its own members. Though the product proper continues to be produced and its production figures are tallied, that with which the peruke-wearer works, or makes do, and the way in which the peruke-wearer works it, is unidentifiable in and of itself to the (strategic) elite (precisely because *they* would deem it improper, i.e., not a proper product to be tallied nor a product properly made), no matter how “popular” (improper) that product becomes:

The same process can be found in the use made in ‘popular’ milieus of the cultures diffused by the ‘elites’ that produce language. The imposed knowledge of symbolisms become objects manipulated by practitioners who have not produced them. The language produced by a certain social category has the power to extend its conquests into vast areas surrounding it, ‘deserts’ where nothing equally articulated seems to exist, but in doing so it is caught in the trap of its assimilation by a jungle of procedures rendered invisible to the conqueror by the very victories he seems to have won. However spectacular it may be, his privilege is likely to be only apparent if it merely serves as a framework for the stubborn, guileful, everyday practices that make use of it. What is called ‘popularization’ or ‘degradation’ of a culture is from this point of view a partial and caricatural aspect of the revenge that utilizing tactics take on the power that dominates production. In any case, the consumer cannot be identified or qualified by the newspapers or commercial products he assimilates: between the person (who uses them) and these products (indexes of the ‘order’ which is imposed on him), there is a gap of varying proportions opened by the use that he makes of them.

(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 32)

⁶⁸ The French idiom is “*faire la perruque*” or “*travailler en perruque*.”

⁶⁹ A “straw boss” is a worker who (often only temporarily) oversees the work of others equal to him or her while doing his or her own work. Though often used pejoratively, it is meant in its ameliorative sense here.

Though in the sections of *L’Invention du quotidien* that discuss *la perruque*, de Certeau is primarily concerned with cultures contemporary to him, a trace of *la perruque*, albeit unsuccessful ones, can be found in *La Fable mystique* in de Certeau’s discussion of reforms attempted in the French Jesuit Order and elsewhere in an around the 1630’s:

This handful of ‘young men,’ ‘little prophets and little saints,’ as one of their censors [Nicolas Du Sault] calls them . . . start a movement similar to the one John of the Cross and his friends had begun in the old Carmelite Order by giving birth to the ‘reformed’ or ‘Discalced’ Carmelites. They fought for a spiritual ‘purity’ within the very institution that asserted its value and gave it a social place. But history did not repeat itself. They failed where John of the Cross had succeeded. Were they perhaps too late?

(de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 241)

One these “young men,” who did not set out to be a reformer, was stricken by “a whiplash on high” in May of 1627. He remains anonymous, for his name is now illegible on the letter that gives his account. He wrote in this letter (to which he refers to himself both in the first person and third person as the archbishop’s valet) to his archbishop about a mystical experience he had while giving mass:

Your valet was saying high mass, when an accident happened to him that was a whiplash from on high [*un coup de fouet d’en-haut*].⁷⁰ While the ecclesiastics were singing the rest of *Gloria in excelsis*, your valet began to meditate when he thought he had an extraordinary devotion [*dévotion extraordinaire*], but it was an indevotion [*indévotion*] instead, as I have been able to gather what happened.

Which was that, the *Gloria in excelsis* being over, having said *Dominus vobiscum* [the Lord be with you] and *Oremus* [Let us pray], I said: *Emitte Spiritum tuum et creabuntur* [Send your Spirit, and all will be created]. Having regained myself, I said the requisite prayer — although I had to consult the Holy Spirit to find out whether my consolation, accompanied by tears and sweetness, was from God and not instead some indevotion from the enemy of the salvation of souls. . . .

And I also said that I would no longer be so pious, though I fear I have never been pious in the way one should, for which I beseech God’s forgiveness and that of his Most Illustrious Lordship, subjecting myself to whatever punishment it may please Your Greatness to require of me.

⁷⁰ The French given in this passage is from de Certeau’s *La Fable mystique* (Gallimard, 1982, p. 352) and not directly from the original letter.

I was supposed to be sitting. But because I found myself in a situation in which there was but one stool for the celebrant and not for the deacon nor the assistant deacon, it bothered me to be sitting while a priest, who is my equal, was standing. For this reason, I occupied myself with meditation during the *Gloria in excelsis* and the Credo.

I beseech Your Greatness to write to me whether I should absolutely reject all extraordinary devotion.

Father Charles advised me some time ago neither to reject it nor seek it out. Obeying Your Greatness, in this and other things, I believe I am pleasing God, for the Apostle said: *Obedite praepositis vestris* [Obey your prelates].

(de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 256)

As his fellow clergymen sing that glory be to God (*Gloria in excelsis*), the writer of the above letter begins to meditate; with this we have his fellow men sending their message to God, while the writer awaits in meditation. With the hymn finished, the writer commands that God be with his fellow worshipers (*Dominus vobiscum*) and asks that they pray and send up another message to God (*Oremus*); however, at this moment an “accident” happens in which the writer, breaking the conventions of the ritual, commands that God send his spirit down instead (*Emitte Spiritum tuum et creabuntur*). Realizing that he is out-of-bounds, the writer immediately returns to the ritual by saying the *requisite* prayer [*l’oraison requise*].

Uncertain whether he is guilty of impiety, the writer of the above letter consults the Holy Spirit — that which he feels shameful for having called upon aloud — to see whether he is truly guilty for calling upon the Holy Spirit aloud. He is uncertain of his answer, his “consolation,” so he turns to his superior in the church hierarchy (the archbishop) and begs for punishment since *he* must have the answer. The writer offers his excuse for meditating on the Lord instead of singing to the Lord: he was bothered because he did not want to sit when his equals must stand. He then asks his superior whether he should reject [*rejeter*] the entire event as extraordinary devotion, citing his immediate superior’s (Father Charles’s) ambivalence on the occasion. He

closes with the statement that he believes that by obeying his superiors he is pleasing God (not by worshipping God himself).

De Certeau says of the letter:

This incident evinces no resistance to the Church authorities but the experience of something other. This anonymous and modest *illuminé* could be the representative of what was 'happening' to many others, within the very institutions they respected. 'Accidents' carried them off elsewhere. These were releases for aspirations that no longer had a language in those institutions. They were not indications of a rebellion but of escapism.

That the 'spirit' might flee the Order, that the desire for the absolute might become alienated from the apostolic projects of the post-Tridentine Church — this was the 'danger' the Jesuit Roman authorities clearly perceived. These 'accidents' called into question the very link between the hierarchic organization of tasks and the divine 'source' upon which the legitimacy of goals and the investiture of individuals was based. The very nature of the Society was at stake.

(de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 256-257)

De Certeau argues repeatedly in *La Fable mystique* that events such as these occurred throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe and that the Church, becoming more political by the day and in many cases synonymous with government, could not tolerate experiences of the other (God) that essentially bypassed its hierarchy; thus, those who experienced otherness, i.e., mystics, were marginalized in this era by excommunication, exile, commitment to asylums as insane or infirm, general suppression, censoring, slander, libel, or, as in the case above, self-censorship and self-censure. Though this period does have traits all its own, de Certeau's discussion of it harkens back to an earlier time in history when the popes of Avignon, though ruling in the relative safety of the pre-Reformation, were dabbling in politics of their own, growing wealthy and corrupt, and consolidating a power that could be threatened by the same means as those in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Knowing by Unknowing

The Avignon Papacy (1309-1377)⁷¹ began under Clement V (1264-1314), who was born in Gascony in southern France. Because of fear of attacks similar to those in Rome that the previous Pope Boniface VIII (1235-1303) had suffered from the French throne and because of his close connections to prominent families and clergy in the south of France, Clement V established his papal court at Avignon in 1309, having moved it to several locations around France after being elected pope in 1305.⁷² The rule of Clement V would characterize that of all the popes of Avignon: the suppression of movements he deemed heretical (the Cathars in southern France and later the Templars by one his successors), the restructuring of the church that greatly lessened its democracy and increased its corruption (the selling of benefices, which in turn were bought by the selling of absolutions), and repeated attempts and failures to assert the popes' power over European monarchs (French kings and Holy Roman emperors). The decadence of the Avignon Papacy reached its height under Pope Clement VI (1291-1352), who had a taste for fine wardrobes and ate off gold and silver plates while thousands died of the plague, though its political power reached its low under Clement VI as well, as he acquiesced to the will of the French Kings Philip VI and John II. The Avignon Papacy ended under Gregory XI (1336-1375), who returned it to Rome for fear of losing control there after several acts of rebellion; however, the damage had been done, and the Church's image was forever tarnished, which is best illustrated in the simultaneous election of different popes in Rome and Avignon, a schism that was not resolved until 1417.

⁷¹ The history of the Avignon Papacy given here is drawn from various articles in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (Robert Appleton, 1907).

⁷² Pope Benedict XI (1240-1304) was Pope in the interim between the death of Boniface VIII and the coronation of Clement V, until his own death in 1304.

After the death of Gregory XI, came the schism that divided not only the Catholic Church but also two countries that had been and would continue warring for over a century in what would come to be (erroneously) called The Hundred Year's War. France, naturally, supported the legitimacy of the popes elected in Avignon, and England, France's enemy, supported those in Rome. In the midst of a corrupt and divided political church emerges Anonymous, who cannot come down on either side, so instead he or she looks beyond the Church and its politics and back to an apolitical history of mysticism, though he or she still must contend with the current political climate.

To achieve his or her ends yet still avoid politics, Anonymous must adapt a product that was such a commodity that it was literally being sold by the Church in his time in the form of absolutions — salvation. Salvation to Anonymous is obtained by doing the good work of contemplation:

This is the work of the soul that most pleases God. All saints and angels rejoice in it, and they're always willing to help you when you're spending time in contemplation. They rush to your side, their powers ready. But contemplation infuriates the devil and his company. That's why they try to stop you in any way they can. Everyone on earth has been helped by contemplation in wonderful ways. You can't know how much. This spiritual exercise lessens the pain for souls in purgatory. And no other discipline can purify your soul as deeply or make you as virtuous.

(*The Cloud of Unknowing* with the *Book of Privy Counsel*, 11)

Anonymous already had much experience with adaptation of “products” in the field of mysticism, for his translations function often both as translations and adaptations, as William Johnston observes:

[Anonymous] has left us three translations. The *Denis Hid Divinity* is a rough translation of a Latin version of *Mystica theologica* of the pseudo-Dionysius [(late 400-early 500)]; A *Treatises of the Study of Wisdom that Men call Benjamin* is based upon the *Benjamin Minor* of Richard of St. Victor [(?-1173)]; and A *Treatise of Discretion of Spirits* is a paraphrase of two sermons of St. Bernard [of Clairvaux (1090-1153)]. I have called these works ‘translations’ but it might be

more accurate to call them adaptations; for the English author freely adds his own ideas and omits what he considers unnecessary. This is made clear in the opening paragraph of *Hid Divinity* where he says of the work of Dionysius, ‘in translation of it I have not only followed the naked letter of the text, but for to declare the hardness of it, I have followed the sentence of the Abbot of St. Victor, a noble and worthy expositor of the same book.’⁷³ And since in his other translations he follows a similar policy of adding and omitting as he thinks fit (indeed, many of the more significant words and phrases are his own additions), it can reasonably be assumed that they, like the original works, express his true mind and can be used in the analysis of his thought.

(*The Mysticism of The Cloud of Unknowing*, 2)

However, Anonymous does have to prevent him or herself from being branded a heretic, which is *obviously* accomplished through anonymity, but Anonymous must also prevent his or her product from being designated as heresy (an improper product) by the ecclesiastical authorities, and to guard against that, he or she explicitly and expressly forbids in the preface to *The Cloud of Unknowing* the removal of any of his or her words from their context and the use of his or her words by anyone that is not wholeheartedly serious about the good work of contemplation:

[I]n the name of love, I ask you, whoever you are, however this book came into your hands — maybe you own it, have borrowed it, are delivering it to someone else, or are safekeeping it for others — regardless, I beg you in the powerful name of love, if at all possible don’t read it to anyone or copy it or quote from it, and don’t let anyone else read it, copy it, or quote from it, unless, in your opinion, that person is sincere in their intentions to follow Christ.

(*The Cloud of Unknowing with the Book of Privy Counsel*, 5)⁷⁴

If the text remains intact, then it can only be mapped as a whole and not as individual fragments that might find their way to the wrong set of eyes or ears. The text cannot be de-contextualized. The text, thus, becomes a walled city whose streets are known but not named.

⁷³ Johnston cites 2:8 of Phyllis Hodgson’s *Deonise Hid Divinite and Other Treatises on Contemplative Prayer Related to The Cloud of Unknowing, A Tretyse of the Stodye of Wysdome that Men Clepen Beniaymn, A Pistle of Preier, A Pistle of Discrecioun of Stirrings, A Tretis of Discrecyon of Spirites*. (Oxford: Early English Text Society, 1955)

⁷⁴ May I be forgiven for going against Anonymous’s wishes.

To further cloak this text in the perceived fashionable righteousness of the day, Anonymous chooses the vernacular, Middle English, as the medium of expression for *The Cloud* and *The Book of Privy Counsel* instead of Latin, a language from which he or she translated.⁷⁵ A work written in the vernacular is more likely to evade the gaze of the draconian scholar or cleric and is more likely to limit its audience to the British Isle's — away from Avignon and Rome. Since the texts were not a vernacularism of the entire sacred text itself,⁷⁶ which John Wycliffe (1320's-1384) *et al* were undertaking in Anonymous's time,⁷⁷ it was far less likely to be suppressed, as the *Wycliffe Bible* was shortly after its appearance.⁷⁸ The vernacular is also more likely to be read (or heard if read aloud)⁷⁹ by those who already go unnoticed, in such ways as dying from the plague while their spiritual leaders are clothed in finery and dine on gilded plates.

⁷⁵ On Anonymous's knowledge of Latin, Cheryl Taylor writes:

That the *Cloud*-author was a skilled Latinist is demonstrated by his translation of the medieval interpretations of Johannes Sarracenus and Thomas Callus of the Pseudo-Dionysius's *Mystical Theology*. Latin was the authorized medium for teaching in the Carthusian circles where he probably moved.

(Taylor, "Paradox upon Paradox: Using and Abusing Language in *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Related Texts," *Parergon* 22.2 [2005], 33)

⁷⁶ The biblical verses cited in *The Cloud* and *Counsel* are translations, however. (Taylor 34, footnote 7)

⁷⁷ Versions of the *Wycliffe Bible* appeared in a period from 1382 to 1395. (*Catholic Encyclopedia*)

⁷⁸ Further evidence of *The Cloud*'s use of the vernacular as a means of avoiding clerical eyes and of the irony that it was ultimately translated into the ecclesiastical language of Latin for clerical eyes is the fact that

as late as the 1490's a need was felt for Latin translations of *The Cloud*. The probability that the Carthusian Thomas Methley commenced his translation because 'theological writings in English had not yet achieved full respectability in conservative circles' renders the *Cloud*-author's choice of English a century before even more distinctive.

(Taylor, "Paradox upon Paradox: Using and Abusing Language in *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Related Texts," *Parergon* 22.2 [2005], 34, footnote 6)

Taylor cites James Hogg's "The Latin *Cloud*" in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Papers Read at Dartington Hall, July 1984*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 1983) pp. 104-15, p. 107, as her source for the quotation concerning Methley's translation.

⁷⁹ On the orality of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Cheryl Taylor writes:

His decision to write only in English is . . . a sign of pastoral care for a readership that seems not to have known Latin. Especially in *The Cloud*, the vernacular supports a colloquial spontaneity and fragmentary organization that suggest an origin in oral composition and dialogue.

(Taylor, "Paradox upon Paradox: Using and Abusing Language in *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Related Texts," *Parergon* 22.2 [2005], 33-34)

Though the type of language is essential in the tactics of Anonymous, the language itself and its rhetorical tactics play an important role in the texts' elusion.

Recall the previous quotation of de Certeau's concerning the tactics of language, repeated here in an abridged form:

The . . . process can be found in the use made in 'popular' milieus of the cultures diffused by the 'elites' that produce language. The imposed knowledge of symbolisms become objects manipulated by practitioners who have not produced them. The language produced by a certain social category has the power to extend its conquests into vast areas surrounding it . . . but in doing so it is caught in the trap of its assimilation by a jungle of procedures rendered invisible to the conqueror by the very victories he seems to have won. . . .What is called 'popularization' or 'degradation' of a culture is from this point of view a partial and caricatural aspect of the revenge that utilizing tactics take on the power that dominates production. In any case, the consumer cannot be identified or qualified by the newspapers or commercial products he assimilates: between the person (who uses them) and these products (indexes of the 'order' which is imposed on him), there is a gap of varying proportions opened by the use that he makes of them.

(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 32)

"[B]etween the person[s] (who uses them)" — Anonymous and his or her readers — and the "products (indexes of the [ecclesiastical] 'order' which is imposed on [them])," — the language of the texts (the product) and imprimaturs (the imposed order) — "there is a gap of varying proportions opened by the use that [they make] of them." Through his or her text, Anonymous, as a peruke-wearer, shows others how to come to union with God on "company time" with "company materials," i.e., through the traditional mentoring relationship with his or her original audience and through the numerous copying done by scribes in the employ of the Church. More importantly, as shall be shown below, Anonymous uses the language of the Church in an adapted form to achieve his ends, to create this "gap of varying proportions."

In her article "Paradox upon Paradox: Using and Abusing Language in *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Related Texts" (*Parergon* 22.2 [2005] 31-51), Cheryl Taylor argues, among

other things, that Anonymous uses what she calls “expansive” and “constrictive” writing as mimesis for the act of contemplation itself, which is a way of “using and yet transcending language” with which “the *Cloud*-author draws closer to his disciple through their shared vocation, briefly dissolving the hierarchy of teacher and learner” (Tayler 39). Taylor equates “expansive” with “rhetorical” language, in the sense of theorizing language, and she equates “constrictive” with “practical” language, in the sense of a utilitarian usage of language. Taylor’s analysis of Anonymous’s work, summarized in the passage below, illustrates Anonymous’s tactics for co-opting the ostentation and hierarchical structure of his or her contemporary Catholic Church (ruled by the Avignon Papacy) in the “complex,” “Latinate,” “ecclesiastical,” “French” language that specifies ideas or “imposes or confirms conformity with authority” (emphasis is my own):

Linguistically expansive and constrictive writing can be distinguished by the following criteria. Expansive passages display *decorative* devices often involving syntactical repetition, as in *balances* and *antitheses*. They include long or *syntactically complex* sentences; *Latinate*, *ecclesiastical*, or *French* vocabulary; and repetitive adjectival adverbial usages. Expansive writing normally *prepares for*, *expounds*, *elaborates*, or *qualifies ideas*, or *imposes* or *confirms conformity with authority*.

(Taylor, “Paradox upon Paradox: Using and Abusing Language in *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Related Texts,” *Parergon* 22.2 [2005], 40)

In contrast, Anonymous’s constrictive language interrupts the order of the expansive language and encourages a transcendence of that order through uncomplicated “verbal simplicities.” Constrictive language emphasizes the individual experience (“personal . . . experiential immediacy”). The language itself signifies its own impotence as a “decoration,” and it encourages the mind to move beyond discourse. These passages are brief and are composed primarily of “Anglo-Saxon or Scandinavian” terms, which have a much longer history on the British Isles than French (emphasis is my own):

The contrasting passages of linguistic constriction *breach* the *literary segmentation* of the text in ways that simulate *interruptions* to the flow of thought in contemplation. As the author encourages the apprentice to embark on the ‘werk’ that will take him *beyond language’s delusions*, various verbal *simplicities* prevail. These passages are associated with the *personal*, with *experiential immediacy*, with the imperative mood of verbs, with vigorous exhortations and *homely examples*. Repetitions, such as the nexus of ‘naked’, ‘blind’, ‘feeling’, and ‘being’ that recurs in such passages in *Privy Counselling*, are signs that language *can penetrate no further*. By marking “failying” of understanding to encourage movement of the mind *beyond discourse* rather than as *decoration*. Vocabulary of constrictive passages is predominantly *Anglo-Saxon* or *Scandinavian* and words are *brief*.

(Taylor, “Paradox upon Paradox: Using and Abusing Language in *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Related Texts,” *Parergon* 22.2 [2005], 40)

Anonymous, as a peruke-wearer, shows the reader how to expand language out into the milieu of the systemic, corrupt, and strategic authority and then constrict it in order to withdraw into an individualized, purposeful, and pure practice of contemplation, which at its pinnacle transcends and abandons language itself to the space of knowing by unknowing — the realm of God.

Hegel Nor the Church Know

If one picks up any book by or on Kierkegaard and turns to a random page, he or she is highly likely to find a critique of or related to the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) or the organized Church.⁸⁰ Kierkegaard despised them both, and no argument need be made here to support that fact, for it has been done countless times. But what was it that brought Kierkegaard’s thinking into so much conflict with them both? The answer is primarily what would come to be called Kierkegaard’s Christian Existentialism, i.e., his notion that the self could be absolute and that a relationship with God required nothing other than the individual self:

⁸⁰ I tried this with several texts and averaged about three out of five.

Every human existence that is not conscious⁸¹ of itself as spirit or conscious of itself before God as spirit, every human existence that does not rest⁸² transparently⁸³ in God but vaguely⁸⁴ rest in and merges in some abstract universality (state, nation, etc.) or, in the dark about his self, regards his capacities merely as powers to produce without becoming deeply aware of their source, regards his self, if it is to have intrinsic meaning, as an indefinable something — every such existence, whatever it achieves, be it most amazing, whatever it explains, be it the whole of existence, however intensely it enjoys life esthetically — every such existence is nevertheless despair.

(Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 46)

In the passage above, Kierkegaard rather slyly libels both Hegel and the Church, particularly the Danish State Church in his homeland. This is not to say that Kierkegaard was timid about outright slander against those two targets, for he certainly did overtly cast aspersions on them, but the more malignant attacks were often the subtle ones. In the passage, Kierkegaard states that “human existence” [*menneskelig Existents*] must be conscious of itself as “spirit” [*Aand*]⁸⁵ or [*eller*]⁸⁶ as a spirit before God. Any other form of existence, which would not be aware of itself as a spirit/consciousness (see note) nor as invisibly grounded in God, must look outside the self to have a notion of its own self, which would only be a nebulous notion of the self not truly

⁸¹ In the Danish, “conscious” is “*bevidst*” and thus parallels “*bevidst*” in the later phrase “becoming deeply aware of their source” [*blive sig bevidst, hvorfra han har dem*] in which “aware” is given above for “*bevidst*.” (Kierkegaard, *Sygdommen til Døden*, 202) Compare its German cognate *bewußt*.

⁸² In the Danish this “rest . . . in” is “*grunder i*” [to be grounded in]; whereas, the later “rest in” in the phrase “but vaguely rest in” [*men dunkelt hviler i*] is “*hviler i*” [to lie in]. (Kierkegaard, *Sygdommen til Døden*, 202) Compare the cognate of the Danish *grunde* with the German *gründen*.

⁸³ In the Danish, “transparently” is “*gjennemsigtig*” (*gennemsigtig* in the modern reformed spelling) which is formed from *gjennem* [through], *sigt* [sight], and *-ig* [(roughly) -ly]. *Sig* [self], a word repeatedly used by Kierkegaard, is contained in *gjennemsigtig*, though the morphemes of the word do not divide in such a way to make that apparent. (Kierkegaard, *Sygdommen til Døden*, 202) Compare the German cognate *sichtig* with the Danish *sigtig*.

⁸⁴ In the Danish, “vaguely” is “*dunkelt*” [darkened] and thus parallels “*Dunkelhed*” [dark(-ness)] in the later phrase “in the dark about his self” [*i Dunkelhed over sit Selv*]. (Kierkegaard, *Sygdommen til Døden*, 202) Compare the German cognates (*ge-)**dunkelt* and *Dunkelheit*, respectively.

⁸⁵ *Aand* (*ånd* in the modern reformed spelling) has the meaning of both “spirit” and “mind” as does the German *Geist*, which Hegel used frequently. Sources were not available to see if Hegel’s *Geist* was translated as *Aand* in his works published in Danish.

⁸⁶ The reader cannot help but recall Kierkegaard’s work *Enten-Eller* (1843) [*Either/Or*] with this conjunction. That work presented two ways of living, one hedonistic, the other morally responsible, recalled here with one spirit conscious of just itself and the other conscious of itself before God.

separated from the world. This latter self, no matter how great a self it believes itself or is deemed to be, will never attain total consciousness and will live in despair.

Kierkegaard's jibes at Hegel in the passage concern Hegel's notions of *Moralität* (individual morality) and *Sittlichkeit* (universal ethics) put forth in his seminal work *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807) [*Phenomenology of the Mind/Spirit*]. *Moralität* is generally an individual's will to act morally. *Sittlichkeit* are the customary ethics of a society, nation, etc and are "universal" in the sense that all members of that society, nation, etc. should know what those ethics are. According to Hegelianism, it is the individual's responsibility to justify *Sittlichkeit* using rational thought and then have proper *Moralität* by willing him or herself to act in conformity with the justified *Sittlichkeit*. Kierkegaard ridicules this notion by ridiculing an existence that "vaguely rests in and merges in some abstract universality (state, nation, etc.)" as being one that must live in despair.

As discussed in Chapter One, Kierkegaard's critique of his contemporary Church was that being a Christian had become synonymous with being born in Christendom, i.e., being born in a Christian country, to Christian parents, and being baptized at a Christian Church, and that many who called themselves Christian did not truly understand, much less appreciate, the nature and power of faith itself. Hence, an existence that "in the dark about [its] self, regards [its] capacities merely as powers to produce without becoming deeply aware of their source, regards [its] self, if it is to have intrinsic meaning, as an indefinable something" that lives in despair.

Kierkegaard's tactics are to avoid becoming aware of a self that can only be defined by its relations to the outside world, in essence, a strategically defined self: "[a] strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it" (de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xix). Kierkegaard is

in search of becoming tactically aware of a self apophatically, a self that is defined by what it is not (what is “exterior” to it) and that constitutes itself. Kierkegaard is in search of a self that is a remainder, that continuously renews and reconfigures its definition of itself according to itself or according to an absolute relation to God. It is a self that:

cannot count on a ‘proper’ [...] nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of the tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances. . . . It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into ‘opportunities’ [*occasions*].

(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xix)

As does Anonymous, Kierkegaard employs linguistic tactics to achieve his goals with a dizzying array of *selves* and other terms that fade away until the reader is left with nothing but a self:

The human self is such a derived, established relation, a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another. . . . The misrelation of despair is not a simple misrelation but a misrelation in a relation that relates itself to itself and has been established by another. . . . The formula that describes the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out is this: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be the itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it.

(Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 13-14)

The Thinker Cannot Know

Denker als Stilisten — Die meisten Denker schreiben schlecht, weil sie uns nicht nur ihre Gedanken, sondern auch das Denken der Gedanken mitteilen.

(Nietzsche, *Werke*, vol. 1, 563)⁸⁷

Thinkers as Stylists — The majority of thinkers write poorly because they communicate not only their thoughts, but also the thinking of their thoughts.

⁸⁷ This aphorism originally appeared in Nietzsche’s *Menschliches Allzumenschliches* (1878) [*Human, all too Human*].

With so much talk of knowing, talk of thinking must follow. Nietzsche's (1844-1900) aphorism above points us in a proper direction in that what can be known, what can be *thought*, is too often inseparable from the act of thinking itself. Nietzsche chooses the form of the aphorism to express this; a form that lends itself well to this type of expression. Kafka discovered the abilities of this form as well in his own *Zürcher Aphorismen*, a fact that Richard T. Gray supports in his book on Kafka's aphorisms, *Constructive Destruction: Kafka's Aphorism: Literary Tradition and Literary Transformation* (Niemeyer, 1987):

More than perhaps any other literary form, the aphorism is typified by its self-conscious awareness of the receptive art of reading. Critics have generally attributed considerable importance to the exaggerated emphasis that aphorists and aphorisms place on effect and effectiveness. Hermann Asemissen goes so far as to maintain that the distinguishing characteristic of the aphorism is its unique effect, and that the presence of this stimulation, common called the aphoristic *pointe*, can be made into the acid test for the discovery of genuine aphorisms. . . . The aphorism's appeal to its reader is commonly conceived in terms of the demand expressed in the text that the reader complete, supply, or test the presented thought. This demand, of course is related to the applicative function of the aphorism. . . . Implicit in the 'universalized' formulation of the aphoristic statement is the requirement that the reader work deductively from this generalization to specific incidents, returning back from the specific to the general through a process of induction. . . . The aphorist, then, is someone who supplies only a skeletal outline of thoughts, allowing the reader to 'flesh out' this skeleton by supplying the 'thinking'⁸⁸ that leads to 'thoughts.' The aphoristic method, accordingly, corresponds to the recording of conclusions without indicating the assumptions out of which they develop. Because of this suppression of the developmental process, the aphoristic thought appears to occur suspended without a context. (Gray, *Constructive Destruction*, 52-53)

But what defines an aphorism as being such a form of expression? Richard T. Gray in the first chapter of his book proposes a definition of the aphorism that focuses on the action of the aphorism itself, a definition that resembles in its approach Cheryl Taylor's explication of *The Cloud of Unknowing* as having certain movements and mechanisms at work in the text.

⁸⁸ Gray is referencing the Nietzsche aphorism above, which he cites in his text.

Gray bases his definition on Roman Jakobson's (1896-1982) opposition of the "metaphoric" and the "metonymic,"⁸⁹ which he briefly characterizes in these terms: "Metonymy . . . adequately defines both syntactical and logical structures which function on the basis of serial combination; metaphor . . . refers both to the linguistic figure of speech and to the process of association which allows substitution based on perceived similarity"⁹⁰ (Gray 50). Gray offers no further explanation of his rather complex definitions, which are adapted from Jakobson's, but in simple terms we may say: The metonymic relationships between words and phrases in an utterance are based on logical associations, which allow the author or reader to substitute one word or phrase for another or to imply such a substitution (e.g., calling fifty ships "fifty sails"); whereas, metaphoric relationships between words and phrases in an utterance are based on illogical or subjective associations ("perceived similarity"), which allow the author or reader to substitute one word or phrase for another or imply such a substitution (e.g., "My mother is a fish"). Gray then gives his definition of the aphorism:

Using Jakobson's phrases the aphorism can be defined as a prose genre in which, in a strictly compressed textual space, the metaphorical and metonymical drives of language and thought enter into an exaggerated dialectical interplay, at times waging a heated and concerted struggle against each other, while at other times mutually reinforcing one another. The aphorism, then, expresses in consciously exaggerated fashion the dialectical relationship between similarity and contiguity, metaphor and metonymy, creative association and logical order. In this context one is still able to conceive of the aphorism . . . as an expressive form that portrays and problematizes the "Erkenntnissituation" [situation of knowledge] of human beings as spanned between art and science, depiction and abstract thought, empirical and theoretical knowledge.

(Gray, *Constructive Destruction*, 50-51)

⁸⁹ Gray cites Jakobson's "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles." *Fundamentals of Language*. The Hague: Mouton, 1956, 76-82. De Certeau also works with the same notions from Jakobson's work in his chapter "The Garden: Delirium and Delights of Hieronymous Bosch" in *The Mystic Fable* (Univ. Chicago, 1992) 49-72; however, to avoid overcomplication de Certeau's chapter is not discussed here.

⁹⁰ Gray offers "contiguity" as a "concomitant" term for the metonymic, and "similarity" for the metaphoric (Gray 50).

One can see something of de Certeau in Gray's definition. The aphorism tactically navigates strategically organized language, and as it does so, makes its own space by undoing and redoing preexisting relations in the process of its reading. Gray's definition is clearly based on what the aphorism does, but rather than discuss the implications of his definition or provide specific examples, Gray immediately develops a system of classification of aphorisms and a method for analyzing the *forms* of the aphorism (which is the primary concern of his book) based on his definition, but he never returns to a discussion of the definition itself.⁹¹ Essentially, Gray leaves his definition as a theory in abstraction and only generally refers to certain aphorists that have tendencies toward either the metonymic or metaphoric. One can, however, easily identify the prevalence of the metaphoric over the metonymic and vice versa in a few examples from a well-known anthology of aphorisms edited by W. H. Auden and Louis Kronenberger, *The Faber Book of Aphorisms* (Faber and Faber, 1962), though both the metaphoric and metonymic are present in every aphorism.

An aphorism by Georg Lichtenberg (1742-1799) emphasizes the metaphoric aspect of language:

Everyone is perfectly willing to learn from unpleasant experience — if only the damage of the first lesson could be repaired.

(Auden and Kronenberger, 23).

In this aphorism, the notion of “experience” is replaced via metaphor with “lesson,” “unpleasant” is replaced with “damage,” and “learn” is replaced with “repaired.” The metaphors are only implied, but the implications are strong. An “experience” teaches a “lesson”; that which is “unpleasant” does “damage”; in order to “learn” the “lesson” from the “experience” the “damage” must be “repaired.”

An aphorism by Novalis (1772-1801) emphasizes the metonymic aspect of language:

⁹¹ One of Gray's primary theses is that Kafka's concern with the aphorism was its form and rarely its content.

“Man is a sun; and the senses are his planets”

(Auden and Kronenberger, 8).

This aphorism makes a comparison between two analogous bodies, “sun” and “planet” in order to compare “man” and “the senses.” Unlike Lichtenberg’s aphorism in which the comparison is drawn between things that are similar by idiomatic and/or implicit associations, Novalis’s aphorism draws a comparison between two analogous things, two things that are logically associated.

The above two aphorisms respectively illustrate the predominance of the metaphoric over the metonymic and vice versa, but they do not exemplify the interplay between the metaphoric and metonymic particularly well. An aphorism from Nietzsche portrays the interplay much better:

The danger of language for spiritual and intellectual freedom — every word is a prejudice.

(Auden and Kronenberger, 34)

“Language” is analogously replaced by “every word”; whereas, “danger” metaphorically becomes “prejudice,” or being prejudiced. Here the metaphoric and metonymic aspects of the aphorism can be seen, as Gray puts it, “waging a heated and concerted struggle against each other.” “Language” or the concept of language as a unified whole is analogously exchanged for the multiplicity of “every word,” which is in turn placed in the “danger” of segregating itself to the point of separation by its “prejudice.”

Gray’s definition of the aphorism certainly emphasizes the action of the aphorism in which “the metaphorical and metonymical drives of language and thought enter into an exaggerated dialectical interplay, at times waging a heated and concerted struggle against each other, while at other times mutually reinforcing one another” (Gray 50), though he is concerned more with how the aphorisms do what they do rather than what they do or why they do it, as he

concludes: “My investigation of Kafka’s aphoristic texts . . . tends to provide analyses rather than interpretations; in this sense its purpose has been to suggest possible approaches to, and manners of understanding, Kafka’s aphoristic and parabolic texts” (Gray 291).⁹² Indeed, Gray resists interpretation at almost every turn: “Kafka’s aphorisms represent his experiments in the application of a specific discursive *method*, and not the simple formulation of a narrowly definable set of ‘beliefs’” (Gray 236); “Kafka was more concerned with stylistic density and discursive technique than with the formulation of particular conceptual/philosophical statements or ideas” (Gray 216). Gray tries to leave the meaning of Kafka’s aphorisms as vague as possible, but he still intimates something, à la Walter H. Sokel⁹³ (Gray’s mentor), that approaches the hermeneutical, though he states that it is not necessarily particular to Kafka’s aphorisms: “The aphorisms are . . . fictions of the self projected through the formal and rhetorical objectivity of aphoristic discourse; but in this sense they are scarcely different, except in textual form, from Kafka’s other fictionalizations of the self in novel, short story, letter, and diary” (Gray 265).

Other than Gray’s text, there are currently only two published book-length studies devoted specifically to Kafka’s aphorisms: Werner Hoffmann’s *Kafkas Aphorismen* (1975) [*Kafka’s Aphorisms*] and ‘Ansturm gegen die letzte irdische Grenze’: *Aphorismen und Spätwerk Kafkas* (1984) [*Onslaught against the last earthly Border’: Aphorisms and late Works of Kafka*].⁹⁴ The reason for such relative lack of scholarship on the specific subject is identified by both Hoffmann and Gray as the marginalization of Kafka’s aphorisms by scholars and critics. Kafka’s aphorisms are often viewed as secondary to his proper “literary” works, as attempts by

⁹² One could compare Gray’s approach to the aphorism to de Certeau’s approach to culture. However, de Certeau supplies at least some application and many examples to illustrate his points; whereas, Gray remains utterly aloof in abstraction.

⁹³ I am thinking here of Sokel’s seminal article “Kafka’s Poetics of the Inner Self.” *Modern Austrian Literature*, 11, No. ¾, 1978, pp.378-58.

⁹⁴ “Ansturm gegen die letzte irdische Grenze” is a quotation from Kafka’s diaries.

Kafka to express a coherent personal philosophy or theology, or as some sort of commentary on all of his other works. This is the case even in the few of what are considered the major critical and theoretical works on Kafka that mention his aphorisms. Both Hoffmann and Gray protest this marginalization and either attempt to integrate the aphorisms with Kafka's other longer works (Hoffmann) or to discover an abstract formal connection between the aphorisms and Kafka's parables (Gray). A complete discussion of the relationship among Kafka's aphorisms and his other works is beyond the scope of this dissertation; indeed, Gray spends over two hundred and sixty pages preparing for such a discussion before he begins it in his final chapter, which itself only lays the groundwork for a true analysis. But both authors, of course, have much to say about the aphorisms themselves. We have heard Gray's thought, so let us now turn to Hoffmann's.

Much of what Hoffmann writes in his first text is reiterated in his longer second text; thus, this discussion will focus primarily on the second. Hoffmann's main concern is the motivation for Kafka's writing of his late works. He theorizes that Kafka, after being diagnosed with tuberculosis, rejected his stance against religion, a resistance which supposedly dominated the period of his life before the diagnosis, and began embracing religion. Hoffmann bases much of his theory on Kafka's reading of Kierkegaard and Hassidic literature during the later years of his life and on scattered references in Kafka's personal writings that can be interpreted to support Hoffmann's claim. Hoffmann believes that Kafka's late works are all unified by the common motivation of a search for God. Hoffmann presents many allegorical readings of Kafka's late works that support his thesis, which is a hermeneutical technique made (in-)famous by Max Brod, to whose memory Hoffmann's book is dedicated. Hoffmann's book has been highly criticized (mainly by Gray) for its rather tired approach of allegorizing Kafka's works,

interpreting those allegories as being representative of particular events in Kafka's own life, and basing that interpretation on scattered biographical and contextual evidence.⁹⁵ The final two paragraphs below are indicative of Hoffmann's method:

Kafka hat sich nicht gesträubt gegen ihn [sein Tod], in der Hoffnung, daß er dem Leben in einer anderen Welt eben darum gewachsen sein werde, weil er sich hier nicht zurechtfinden konnte.

Er hatte nach dem Aphorismus 96 den Freuden des Lebens mißtraut, weil die Menschen sich ihnen aus Furcht vor ihrer Vergänglichkeit hingaben — 'aus Angst vor dem Aufsteigen in ein höheres Leben' — und er hatte die Leiden, die die anderen fürchten, hingenommen, weil sie ihm zu dem Aufsteig verhelfen konnten und weil, 'das, was in dieser Welt Leiden heißt, in einer anderen Welt, unverändert und nur befreit von seinem Gegensatz, Seligkeit ist.'

(Hoffmann, 'Ansturm gegen die letzte irdische Grenze', 277)

Kafka had not resisted it [his death] in the hope that a new life would be created just for him in another world because he could not cope with his life here.

After aphorism 96, he doubted that there was any joy in life because humanity had sacrificed it out of fear of their transience — 'out of fear of the ascent to a higher life' — and he had accepted the suffering that they feared because the suffering could help him in his ascent and because 'that which we call suffering in this world is in another world, unchanged and merely freed of its conflict, bliss.'⁹⁶

In order to support his theory of Kafka's view of death, of Kafka's expressing such personal views in his aphorisms, and of a reader's ability to divine such conclusions from two of Kafka's aphorisms, Hoffmann quotes only part of aphorisms 96 and 97 in this passage, and thus removes the words of the aphorisms from perhaps the only context they can have — the rest of the

⁹⁵ This hermeneutical approach is perpetuated to this day, albeit with modification and to achieve different ends, in publications as recent as 2005, such as Roberto Calasso's *K.* (from which the chapter concerning Kafka's aphorisms, the final chapter of the book, was used as the afterword to the most recent translation of Kafka's Zürau aphorisms into English, *The Zürau Aphorisms* [Schocken, 2006]) in which, after agreeing with Brod on several points and drawing conclusions repeatedly from the sparse evidence of Kafka's personal life, Calasso writes (emphasis is my own): "these slips of paper [the Zürau aphorisms] constitute the *only* text in which Kafka directly confronts theological themes. If there is a theology in Kafka, this is the *only* place where he himself comes close to declaring it." (Calasso 295-296). While this dissertation definitely argues that Kafka declares — indeed constructs — a theology in his aphorisms, to make a claim that it is the *only* place that he does so is troubling, to say the least.

⁹⁶ This passage is my translation; there is no published translation of Hoffmann's text.

aphorisms, one of which, 97, contradicts Hoffmann's interpretation by explicitly denying earthly suffering's ability to assist one in ascending to an afterlife:

96. *Die Freuden dieses Lebens sind nicht die seinen, sondern unsere Angst vor dem Aufsteigen in ein höheres Leben; die Qualen dieses Lebens sind nicht die seinen, sondern unsere Selbstqual wegen jener Angst.*

97. *Nur hier ist Leiden Leiden. Nicht so, als ob die, welche hier leiden, anderswo wegen dieses Leidens erhöht werden sollen, sondern so, daß das was in dieser Welt Leiden heißt, in einer andern Welt, unverändert und nur befreit von seinem Gegensatz, Seligkeit ist.*

96. The joys of this life are not life's, but instead our fear of the ascent to a higher life; the torments of this life are not life's, but instead our self-torment because of that fear.

97. Only here is suffering suffering. Not as if those who suffer here should be praised elsewhere because of this suffering, but instead that that which is called suffering in this world is in another world, unchanged and merely freed of its conflict, bliss.⁹⁷

That Kafka believed "that a new life would be created just for him in another world because he could not cope with his life here" is not specifically explained by Hoffmann, nor does he explain exactly how Kafka's acceptance of the suffering that others fear would help him in ascending to a higher life. Hoffmann's interpretation contradicts what is explicitly stated in aphorism 97: that it is "not so as if those who suffer here should be praised elsewhere because of this suffering." Furthermore, neither aphorism makes mention of accepting suffering, and in fact, they imply that one cannot accept suffering while one is here. Hoffmann makes no attempt to deal with the aphorisms in their entirety, or in comparison to one another, but rather merely lifts lines from each to support his argument. With that being said, something is to be salvaged

⁹⁷ This and all subsequent block quotations of Kafka's Zürau aphorisms are taken from Kafka's *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente II* (Schocken, 1992) pp. 113-140. The number of each aphorism is given rather than the page number. The translations are my own.

from Hoffmann's book: that Kafka's aphorisms are more than mere words or "reflections"⁹⁸ and that they are active, in this case in a search for God.

Curiously, traces of both Hoffmann's and Gray's techniques can be found in the writings of Siegfried Kracauer, which specifically discuss Kafka's aphorisms (though not in a book-length study dedicated entirely to them) more than forty years prior to Hoffmann and Gray. In a series of separate essays that were ultimately collected in *Das Ornament der Masse: Essays* (1963) [*The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Harvard U. P., 1995)], Siegfried Kracauer (1889-1966) analyzes the modes of thought of three of the most important minds of the twentieth century: Georg Simmel (1858-1918), Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), and Franz Kafka (1883-1924). Kracauer's analyses rely heavily upon the rhetorical methods of the writers to exemplify their modes of thought, and the terms he uses to describe such thought would remind today's reader of the study of cognitive linguistics, though Kracauer was writing decades before that discipline was truly realized. Kracauer describes Simmel's thought as analogy, Benjamin's as metaphor, and Kafka's as signified without sign (fittingly there is no true single term for Kracauer's description of Kafka's thought). Interestingly, an analysis of Kracauer's own mode of thought when thinking of these three authors reveals Kracauer's appropriation of each author's mode of thought to describe the respective author's mode. Such appropriations invite the question of whether an objective perspective for discussing the thought, or the thinking, of others is possible. What follows here is an explication of Kracauer's analyses of each of the three authors, then an analysis of Kracauer's own mode of thought, a discussion of the possibility

⁹⁸ Ironically, Max Brod originally titled Kafka's Zürau aphorisms "Betrachtungen über Sünde, Leid, Hoffnung und den wahren Weg" [Reflections on Sin, Pain, Hope, and the true Way]. This title also inspires Roberto Calasso's previously mentioned thought from *K*: "Brod's [title] is both appealing and, in its solemnity, misleading, but it rightly suggests that fact that these slips of paper [the Zürau aphorisms] constitute the *only* text in which Kafka directly confronts theological themes" (Calasso 295).

of objectivity when thinking about the thought of others, and finally how Kracauer's thinking is similar to and problematizes Hoffmann's and Gray's thinking.

Kracauer characterizes Simmel's mode of thought as a holistic one that envisions every object of study as both a single phenomenon and an inseparable part of the universe. Simmel does not begin with a fundamental idea and then seek its exemplification in the world, but rather he begins with a single object of study or idea and explores its relations to other ideas and objects in order to expose an underlying commonality among them:

Simmel is a born mediator between phenomena and ideas; using a net of relations of analogy and of essential homogeneity, he advances from the surface of things to their spiritual/intellectual substrata everywhere he looks. In the process, he demonstrates that this surface is symbolic in character and that it is the manifestation and result of these spiritual/intellectual powers and essentialities.
(Kracauer 253)

Simmel's thought functions analogically in that it moves from one phenomenon or idea to another following clearly defined logical relationships between such phenomena and ideas. An example of Simmel's mode of thought can be found in his essay "The Stranger"⁹⁹ in which Simmel moves from a general notion of the stranger, to a specific one via elimination of unfit characteristics, to the stranger as traveling trader, to the traveling trader as fixed trader, to the objectivity of the fixed trader, to the freedom of objectivity, and so on. A continuous line of reasoning can be followed through this essay as it traces "a net of relations of analogy" that ultimately leads to the "spiritual/intellectual substrata" of proximity relations within groups.

Like Simmel, Benjamin does not move from a fundamental idea to the world, but unlike Simmel, Benjamin does not follow a continuous, meandering line of thought. Benjamin works with unrelated fragments that "point to essentialities" (Kracauer 263), and Kracauer characterizes this mode of thought as one of metaphor. Benjamin's mode of thought leaps from one topic to a

⁹⁹ A translation of this essay appears in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, translated by Kurt Wolf (New York: Free Press, 1950).

seemingly unrelated topic that finds its link with the first topic only via metaphor. Akin to Gottfried Leibnitz's (1646-1716) monads that exist as worlds within themselves that are nonetheless related to all other monads, Benjamin's "procedure [of thought is] monadological" (Kracauer 259). One of the examples offered by Kracauer is Benjamin's collection of aphorisms *One Way Street*.¹⁰⁰ The text moves through a plethora of disparate and diverse topics, such as filling stations, breakfast rooms, the number 113, clocks, gloves, and even German inflation. Almost every aphorism is titled, and often the relationship between the title and the aphorism itself is obscure. However, after reading and digesting the entire collection, one has a clearer picture of Benjamin's Weltanschauung that is the product of Benjamin and the reader's finding (and perhaps creating) the link between the objects and ideas discussed in Benjamin's *One Way Street*.

According to Kracauer, there are no such links in the thought of Kafka. Every relation among objects and ideas refers one to an origin that cannot be reached: "All of Kafka's work circles around this one insight: that we are cut off from the true word, which even Kafka himself is unable to perceive" (Kracauer 270). Kracauer's invocation of the unreachable "true word" [*das wahre Wort*]¹⁰¹ is best described in relation to his analyses of Simmel and Benjamin as signified without sign, for Kafka's mode of thought is forever seeking expression of an unnamed and inexpressible object. Every attempt to name the object is misspoken, which breeds only confusion and forever defers the calling of the "true word." Kracauer uses numerous examples from the later part of Kafka's oeuvre to illustrate his point, of which perhaps the best is Kafka's short story "The City Coat of Arms," in which the construction of the Tower of Babel is

¹⁰⁰ Though originally published on its own, a translation of this collection of aphorisms appears in Benjamin's *Selected Writings*, edited by Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

¹⁰¹ Kracauer's term echoes Kafka's "*der wahre Weg*" [the true way] from the first and many other aphorisms in Kafka's *Züräuf Aphorisms*.

described as one of perpetual delays and digressions that lead to confusion and fighting among the people and ultimate distraction from the construction project. Every attempt to continue construction, however well-intended, only serves to hinder its completion.

Since Kracauer's analyses of the thinking of Simmel, Benjamin, and Kafka are so insightful, one cannot help but wonder what such an analysis of Kracauer's own mode of thought would yield. Though Kracauer's voice can be heard in each of these three essays, the voice of authors who are the topics of the essays can be heard as well. Kracauer appropriates the modes of thought of each of his objects of study as he studies them.

In his essay on Simmel, Kracauer's use of Simmel's method is apparent from the start. Kracauer begins by excluding everything from his description of Simmel that Simmel did not do, including interpreting "the world through the prism of the sublime metaphysical idea," discovering "the magic word for the macrocosm," and expressing "a far-reaching, all-encompassing notion of the world" (Kracauer 225). In the following paragraphs, Kracauer examines the thought of Simmel by following a line of reasoning, moving from the "raw material" to "different material realms" to the "second realm of material" to the "third realm of conceptual material" (Kracauer 226-228). The rest of the essay continues as if it were written by Simmel, following analogous and logical connections between phenomena and ideas.

In his essay on Benjamin, Kracauer once again mimics the metaphorical thought of his object of study. Kracauer uses two disparate works (connected only in that they share the same author) to characterize the thought of Benjamin: *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, a topic-oriented examination of Baroque German tragic dramas, and *One Way Street*, a collection of aphorisms dealing with numerous topics. Kracauer discusses both these works without privileging one, and he never truly discusses the works' relation to one another, leaving the

reader to discover or create this connection via metaphor. Kracauer even borrows one of Benjamin's metaphors to describe his conception of Benjamin's mode of thought: "Opinions are to the vast apparatus of social existence what oil is to machines. One does not go up to a turbine and pour machine oil over it; one applies a little to hidden spindles and joints that one has to know" (Kracauer 263).

In his essay on Kafka, Kracauer adopts Kafka's mode of thought as well. With Simmel, Kracauer discusses his entire oeuvre in general; with Benjamin, he discusses specifics of two of his works; with Kafka, Kracauer makes numerous scattered references to all sorts of works from the later part of Kafka's life. Some of these references, mainly aphorisms, go completely unexplained and are left to the reader for interpretation; some references, such as to "The Village Schoolmaster" and "The City Coat of Arms," serve as short digressions and are discussed in a few sentences; others, such as to "Investigations of a Dog" are discussed at length but never in their entirety, rather only in fragments of the work. One sees the same rhetoric of Kafka's in Kracauer's constant diversions to the original texts of Kafka to exemplify points, which often only invite more questions than answers, just as in "The City Coat of Arms," every attempt to complete the tower only serves to hinder its completion. This is not to say that one learns nothing from Kracauer's essay, but rather that it brings the reader closer to understanding Kafka but never completely, which aligns perfectly with Kafka's thought. The final paragraph of the essay is littered with such phrases as "perhaps," "or could it be," and "it is not certain," and Kracauer discusses multiple conflicting interpretations of Kafka's works without necessarily privileging any particular one. The final sentence of the essay exemplifies Kracauer's appropriation of Kafka's mode of thought best: "It is here that we remain, with the unconfirmed longing for the place of freedom" (Kracauer 278).

Kracauer's appropriation of Simmel's, Benjamin's, and Kafka's thought to discuss each author respectively poses the question: Is true objective thought possible when analyzing the thought, or the thinking, of others? Though Kracauer's appropriation of such modes of thought was likely intentional or at the least subconsciously motivated, the fact that he chose to do so three times implies that other methods might prove ineffective. If one were to adopt these methods for him or herself and use them to answer the above question concerning the possibility of objectively analyzing thought, then Simmel's mode would describe a mind consisting of almost infinite congruent and connected faculties that functioned both independently and as a whole; Benjamin's mode would describe a fragmented mind, perhaps a more complicated version of Freud's iceberg model, in which unrelated faculties would function unaware of each other but nonetheless in relation to one another via metaphorical orchestrations; Kafka's mode would describe a mind that perpetually wanders from thought to thought with the goal of discovering the one continuous thought that is forever in the back of the thinker's mind; Kracauer's mode would describe a malleable brain that constantly adapts to the task at hand and learns from experience. The last mode is paradoxically the answer, for the mode of thought of Kracauer creates objectivity through its malleability, albeit an ever-changing objectivity. Kracauer's appropriation of the mode of thought of others imposes the least amount of subjectivity onto his object of study and is thereby the most objective; however, this form of objectivity is subjective in that it must adapt to each new object of study.

One can recognize an affinity between Kracauer's and Hoffmann's work in that both view Kafka's later works as a form of searching. Hoffmann believed this search was for God; whereas, Kracauer describes it as a search for the ever-elusive "true word." An affinity with Gray's work can be recognized as well, for both use the notions and terminology of metaphoric

and analogical modes of thought and expression in their analysis of others' works. Kracauer, Hoffmann, and Gray all exemplify ways to the Kafkan aphorism, but as Kracauer clearly understood, there are many ways, but each must be constantly tested and revised. There are tactical ways around and through every strategic system, and one must follow the trace of the aphorism as it creatively eludes strategic systems in order to find the ways. The discussion of Kafka's *Zürcher Aphorismen* that follows here will outline a method for doing just that. It will provide a method that reacts to its object of study and follows the way wherever it leads. Unlike Hoffmann's, this method relies most heavily on textual evidence for its analysis, and unlike Gray's, it requires one to make interpretations, but these interpretations are made in the manner of Kracauer, constantly reacting to the matter at hand with the tactics developed for a strategic system.

The four aphorisms selected for discussion below appear to have little in common, excepting 60 and 61, which both discuss the "world" and "love" but in differing senses. These aphorisms are chosen to illustrate Kafka's continuously renewed perspective: These four were all originally written on December 9th, 1917,¹⁰² and were selected by Kafka from the five aphorisms written on that day to be included in the "final" collection in February of 1918, after all of them had been redacted. The fifth, uncollected aphorism written on December 9th, 1917, shall be discussed as well.

59. *Eine durch Schritte nicht tief ausgehöhlte Treppenstufe ist, von sich selbst aus gesehen, nur etwas öde zusammengefügtes Hölzernes.*

59. A stair step not deeply worn through by stepping is, viewed from its own perspective, only some drearily assembled wooden thing.

¹⁰² Kafka noted the dates of compositions in his notebook and often included with the date a recent or current event, a place or places he had visited, a person or persons with which he had met, or a remark or observation. For this date, he wrote "*Kirchweihfest gestern*" [literally, church-consecration-festival yesterday]. A *Kirchweihfest* is a fair held to commemorate the founding and/or consecration of a church. The date, the comment, and the aphorisms can be found on pages 60-61 of Kafka's *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente II* (Schocken, 1992).

60. *Wer der Welt entsagt, muß alle Menschen lieben, denn er entsagt auch ihrer Welt. Er beginnt daher das wahre menschliche Wesen zu ahnen, das nicht anders als geliebt werden kann, vorausgesetzt daß man ihm ebenbürtig ist.*

60. Whoever renounces the world must love all people, for he also renounces their world. With doing that, he begins to have a notion of true human nature, which cannot be but loved, assuming that one is equal to the task.

61. *Wer innerhalb der Welt seinen Nächsten liebt tut nicht mehr und nicht weniger Unrecht als wer innerhalb der Welt sich selbst liebt. Es bliebe nur die Frage, ob das erstere möglich ist.*

61. Whoever within the world loves his neighbor does no more or no less wrong than whoever in the world loves him or herself. Only the question would remain, whether the former is possible.

62. *Die Tatsache, daß es nicht anderes gibt als eine geistige Welt, nimmt uns die Hoffnung und gibt uns die Gewißheit.*

62. The fact that there is nothing other than a spiritual world takes from us hope and gives to us certainty.

Though all composed on the same day, each of these aphorisms presents a unique perspective on perspectives. As the perspectives change from aphorism to aphorism, sometimes even within an aphorism, new perspectives are achieved based on comparing the individual perspectives, which in turn provide their own perspectives based on the many interwoven perspectives on perspectives. In the end, if the end can indeed be reached, Kafka constructs a self not at all unlike Kierkegaard's notion of the self-relating relations of the self, which in a manner similar to Anonymous's, dissolve a physical world in order to contact a spiritual.

Aphorism 59 presents the perspective of an inanimate stair step:

59. *Eine durch Schritte nicht tief ausgehöhlte Treppenstufe ist, von sich selbst aus gesehen, nur etwas öde zusammengefügtes Hölzernes.*

59. A stair step not deeply worn through by stepping is, viewed from its own perspective, only some drearily assembled wooden thing.

The once living wood has been fitted together with other dead wood to form a stair case. This “fitting together” or “assembling” [“*zusammengefügtes*”] was done “drearily” or “boringly” [“*öde*”], and as such the wooden thing now lacks any special or distinguishing characteristic from other assembled wooden things. Only by wear will it come to be something unique; only when it is almost worn through by human use will it take on character.

Aphorism 60 takes as its perspective a human who renounces the world:

60. Wer der Welt entsagt, muß alle Menschen lieben, denn er entsagt auch ihrer Welt. Er beginnt daher das wahre menschliche Wesen zu ahnen, das nicht anders als geliebt werden kann, vorausgesetzt daß man ihm ebenbürtig ist.

60. Whoever renounces the world must love all people, for he also renounces their world. With doing that, he begins to have a notion of true human nature, which cannot be but loved, assuming that one is equal to the task.

By doing so, he or she “must love all people” because their world is then renounced as well. In renouncing the others’ world along with his or hers, he or she begins to discover “true human nature, which cannot be but loved.” Humanity’s true nature must be loved, or more precisely cannot be anything else but loved, because if the world has been renounced, then only our true nature is left, which, if rejected itself and not loved, would leave nothing, not even a human self, because it would have no true nature to make it such. However, an assumption must be made for this process to take place — he or she must be equal to the task: he or she must be able to renounce the world, love all people, and be able to conceive of true human nature by loving it purely.

Aphorism 61 presents another person who does not love true human nature but rather his or her neighbor:

61. Wer innerhalb der Welt seinen Nächsten liebt tut nicht mehr und nicht weniger Unrecht als wer innerhalb der Welt sich selbst liebt. Es bliebe nur die Frage, ob das erstere möglich ist.

61. Whoever within the world loves his neighbor does no more or no less wrong than whoever in the world loves him or herself. Only the question would remain, whether the former is possible.

With this aphorism, however, he or she cannot renounce the world, for this person must remain “within the world,” and here love accomplishes nothing special; no more or no less righteousness is had through loving his or her neighbor than loving the self. Yet, like aphorism 60, there is also a condition given in aphorism 61: Though he or she can love the self, it is not necessarily possible that he or she can love a neighbor. That question would have to be answered to test the hypothesis presented in the aphorism.

The perspective is changed once again from a single human to the human collective in Aphorism 62:

62. *Die Tatsache, daß es nicht anderes gibt als eine geistige Welt, nimmt uns die Hoffnung und gibt uns die Gewißheit.*

62. The fact that there is nothing other than a spiritual world takes from us hope and gives to us certainty.

“That there is nothing other than a spiritual world” affects us by taking away our hope and giving us certainty. Why is this so? In a state of believing that there is a physical world, we are able to hope for the possibility of reaching the spiritual one; however, if we discover that we are already in the spiritual world, which we had believed was the physical, we obtain a new certainty — we must no longer wonder about the nature of the spiritual world and how to reach it — but we lose all the former hope we had when we thought that the spiritual world was something to be reached.

In the one aphorism written on December 9th, 1917 that was not later collected by Kafka into what would come to be called *The Zürau Aphorisms*, the perspective is changed again to that

of “the observer of the soul,” before being changed once more in the middle of the aphorism to the soul itself:

Der Beobachter der Seele kann in die Seele nicht eindringen, wohl aber gibt es eine Randstrich, an dem er sich mit ihr berührt. Die Erkenntnis dieser Berührung ist, daß auch die Seele von sich selbst nicht weiß. Sie muß also unbekannt bleiben. Das wäre nur dann traurig wenn es etwas anderes außer der Seele gäbe, aber es gibt nicht anderes.

(Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente II*, 61)

The observer of the soul cannot penetrate the soul; however, there is a dividing line at which he makes contact with it.¹⁰³ The insight gained from this contact is that the soul also knows nothing of itself. It must therefore remain unknown. This would only be sad if there were something beyond the soul, but there is nothing else.

The observer of the soul, the human looking inward to his or her spiritual self, cannot see inside the soul, but can see only the dividing line that separates the physical, observable self and the spiritual, unobservable soul. With the recognition that the soul cannot be seen, the conclusion is reached that the soul cannot know itself because it too is limited to this dividing line and cannot observe the physical self nor the world in which it exists. Though the soul must remain unknown, that fact would only sadden the human and the soul if there were something else beyond the soul, but there is nothing (spiritual) beyond the soul for it to know.

More perspectives are still to be added to the ones presented in the aphorisms above, for Kafka made several decisions when transferring his aphorisms from the notebooks in which they were originally written to the fair copy of his collection of aphorisms. The last aphorism discussed above was not transferred; hence, that perspective was negated. Aphorism 59 was altered by inserting “*öde*” [drearily] where “*besonders*” [specially] had stood in the original.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ The word translated as “contact” here is “*berühren*,” which also implies influence.

¹⁰⁴ In the following discussion of the original versions of aphorism 59-60, the final version of each aphorism from the fair copy is given first, followed by the original version of the aphorism that appears in the notebooks, which

59. *Eine durch Schritte nicht tief ausgehöhlte Treppenstufe ist, von sich selbst aus gesehen, nur etwas öde zusammengefügtes Hölzernes.*

59. A stair step not deeply worn through by stepping is, viewed from its own perspective, only some drearily assembled wooden thing.

Eine durch Schritte nicht tief ausgehöhlte Treppenstufe ist, von sich selbst aus gesehen, nur etwas besonders zusammengefügtes Hölzernes.

A stair step not deeply worn through by stepping is, viewed from its own perspective, only some specially assembled wooden thing.

As previously interpreted, the final version of aphorism 59 presents a piece of wood, a stair step, that must become unique through wear because it was drearily assembled like all the other stairs. In the original, the stair step is already “specially assembled” and must become *like* the other stair steps by its wear.

Aphorism 60 was modified from its original form by removing the quotation marks Kafka had placed around “Welt” [world].

60. *Wer der Welt entsagt, muß alle Menschen lieben, denn er entsagt auch ihrer Welt. Er beginnt daher das wahre menschliche Wesen zu ahnen, das nicht anders als geliebt werden kann, vorausgesetzt daß man ihm ebenbürtig ist.*

60. Whoever renounces the world must love all people, for he also renounces their world. With doing that, he begins to have a notion of true human nature, which cannot be but loved, assuming that one is equal to the task.

Wer der Welt entsagt, muß alle Menschen lieben, denn er entsagt auch ihrer „Welt“. Er beginnt daher das wahre menschliche Wesen zu ahnen, das nicht anders als geliebt werden kann, vorausgesetzt daß man ihm ebenbürtig ist.

Whoever renounces the world must love all people, for he also renounces their “world.” With doing that, he begins to have a notion of true human nature, which cannot be but loved, assuming that one is equal to the task.

In the original version of the aphorism, the world of others that the single person renounces is designated as a different world than the one which the single person renounces for him or

were reprinted in Kafka's *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente II* (Schocken, 1992) pp. 60-61. The original versions were not numbered, but those in the fair copy were.

herself. All the other steps of the process *apparently* remain the same as in the redacted version — he or she must be able to renounce *a* world, love all people, and be able to conceive of true human nature by loving it purely — and the conditional assumption remains that the single person must be equal to the entire task. But the difference in the worlds in the original version of the aphorism now calls into question a possible difference in “true human nature” — is this nature as subjective as the single person’s world?

Aphorism 61 undergoes an even more significant redaction as it is transferred from the notebook to the fair copy. The way in which the person is wrong in loving is qualified differently, and the condition of being able to love one’s neighbor is not brought into doubt:

61. Wer innerhalb der Welt seinen Nächsten liebt tut nicht mehr und nicht weniger Unrecht als wer innerhalb der Welt sich selbst liebt. Es bliebe nur die Frage, ob das erstere möglich ist.

61. Whoever within the world loves his neighbor does no more or no less wrong than whoever in the world loves him or herself. Only the question would remain, whether the former is possible.

Wer innerhalb der Welt seinen Nächsten liebt tut Unrecht, nicht mehr und nicht weniger Unrecht als wer innerhalb der Welt sich selbst liebt.

Whoever within the world loves his neighbor does wrong, no more or no less wrong than whoever in the world loves him or herself.

In contrast to the redacted version of the aphorism, a person who loves his or her neighbor now definitely does wrong, but the wrong done is still no more or no less wrong than a person who loves his or her self. More importantly, however, the condition is not given that it might not be possible for a person to love his neighbor. The only statement now made is that it is wrong to love, but the object of a person’s love does not affect the degree of the error.

The final aphorism to be collected from those written by Kafka on Dec. 9th, 1917, also underwent significant redaction:

62. *Die Tatsache, daß es nicht anderes gibt als eine geistige Welt, nimmt uns die Hoffnung und gibt uns die Gewißheit.*

62. The fact that there is nothing other than a spiritual world takes from us hope and gives to us certainty.

Die Tatsache, daß es nur eine geistige Welt gibt, nimmt uns die Hoffnung und gibt uns die Gewißheit.

The fact that there is only a spiritual world takes from us hope and gives to us certainty.

The final version of the aphorism allows for “nothing other than a spiritual world.” The original version does not negate everything other than a spiritual world, but rather states positively that the only world is the spiritual one. Something may exist beyond the spiritual world, but whatever it may be, it cannot exist within the spiritual world. In the original version of the aphorism, as in the redacted version, we are still given certainty that there is only a spiritual world and our hope for attaining it is still dashed — but the possibility is now given that we may exist outside the spiritual world, and, even more disheartening, that this thing that we believe to be a “world” is not a “world” at all, but only *something* outside the spiritual world.

We will likely never be able to determine what Kafka’s intent was for his *Züräu Aphorisms*. If they were meant only as a personal exploration for Kafka, then the reader can see that much like the “self” as defined by Kierkegaard, whom Kafka was reading as he wrote these aphorisms, Kafka was moving through a dizzying array of notions that ultimately confound all thought until all that is left is the self — a way of negating not unlike Anonymous’s. If Kafka intended the collection for publication, even the simultaneous congruence and conflict among the aphorisms in the fair copy present the reader with an array as dizzying, often within only a single aphorism. Whatever the intent, Kafka’s *Züräu Aphorisms* break down thought to a purity — The thinker cannot know.

Discourses that Do — Practice...Practice...Practice

Exorcising Language: Paronomasias

I am trying to hear these fragile ways in which the body makes itself heard in the language, the multiple voices set aside by the triumphal *conquista* of the economy that has, since the beginning of the ‘modern age’ (i.e., since the seventeenth or eighteenth century), given itself the name of writing. My subject is orality, but an orality that has been changed by three or four centuries of Western fashioning. We no longer believe . . . that, behind the doors of our cities, in the nearby distance of the countryside, there are vast poetic and ‘pagan’ pastures where one can still hear songs, myths, and the spreading murmur of the *folkelighed* (a Danish word that cannot be translated: it means ‘what belongs to the people’).¹⁰⁵ These voices can no longer be heard except within the interior of the scriptural systems where they recur. They move about, like dancers, passing lightly through the field of the other.

(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 131)

In the tenth chapter of *L’Invention du quotidien*, “*L’Économie Scripturaire*” [“The Scriptural Economy”], Michel de Certeau goes in search of a lost orality that has been appropriated by what he calls “the scriptural economy.” De Certeau writes that orality, which was for centuries the mutable means by which history and law passed through generations and which was the voice of the people, has been consumed, largely due to the Enlightenment, by the practice of writing, particularly the writing of history, cultural studies, and their related disciplines and

¹⁰⁵ De Certeau is referencing a translation of the Danish philosopher Níolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig’s (1783-1872) *Budstikke i Høinorden* (1864) by Erica Simon in *Réveil national et culture populaire en Scandinavie: La genèse de la Højskole nordique, 1844-1878* (Copenhagen, 1960) 54-59. The parenthetical in the English above is made by the translator (Steven Rendall) of *The Practice of Everyday Life*. De Certeau’s parenthetical in the original French is “mot intraduisible parce que son équivalent français, ‘popularité,’ a été lui aussi dévalué par l’usage que nous en avons fait, alors qu’il est pour ‘peuple’ l’analogue de ce que ‘nationalité’ est pour ‘nation.’” (de Certeau, *L’Invention du quotidien*, Union Générale, 1980) 231-232 [untranslatable word because its French equivalent, ‘popularity,’ has been devalued by the usage of it that we have allowed ourselves to make, though it is analogously to ‘people’ what ‘nationality’ is to ‘nation’]. Though Grundtvig may have used *folkelighed* as a trope and de Certeau’s translator may be rendering the meaning of the trope in his parenthetical rather than the word’s literal meaning, *folkelighed* could be rendered literally via cognates in English as “folk-ly-hood,” meaning an abstraction of the quality or state of the people. Compare also the German cognates with the Danish: *volklich* [*folkelig*] and –*heit* [-*hed*].

derivatives.¹⁰⁶ Now, true orality only exists in trace amounts in our modern texts: this is so because orality, as de Certeau defines it, was inseparable from the people; whereas, writing, as de Certeau defines it, exists apart from and rules that which it is supposed to merely record. “I designate as ‘writing’ the concrete activity that consists in constructing, on its own, blank space (*un espace propre*) — the page — a text that has power over the exteriority from which it has first been isolated” (de Certeau 134). De Certeau goes on to identify three elements of writing that explain its procedures: “*blank page*,” “*text*,” and “‘meaning.’”¹⁰⁷

[T]he *blank page*: a space of its own delimits a place of production for the subject. It is a place where the ambiguities of the world have been exorcised. It assumes the withdrawal and the distance of a subject in relation to an area of activities. . . . a *text* is constructed in this place [the *blank page*]. Linguistic fragments or materials are treated (factory-processed, one might say) in this space according to methods that can be made explicit and in such a way as to produce an order. . . . [T]his construction [of a *text* on a *blank page*] is not merely a game. To be sure, in every society, play is a stage on which the formality of practices is represented, but the condition of its possibility is that it be detached from actual social practices. On the contrary, the ‘meaning’ (‘*sens*’) of scriptural play, the production of a system, a space of formalization, refers to the reality from which it has been distinguished *in order to change it*. Its goal is social efficacy. It manipulates its exteriority. The writing laboratory has a ‘strategic’ function: either an item of information received from tradition or from the outside is collected, classified, inserted into a system and thereby transformed, or the rules and models developed in this place (which is not governed by them) allow one to act on the environment and transform it.

(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 134-135)

¹⁰⁶ De Certeau examines the predominance of writing over speaking in modernity at length in his book *L'Écriture de l'histoire* (Gallimard, 1975), translated as *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (Columbia University Press, 1988).

¹⁰⁷ The terms in the French are “*page blanche*,” “*texte*,” and “‘*sens*,’” respectively (de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien* [Gallimard, 1980] 235-236). De Certeau italicizes *page blanche* and *texte* as de facto headings of the paragraphs that discuss those elements of writing; however, he gives no one italicized term to designate the last element but places *sens* in quotation marks (hence my two sets of quotation marks when citing it), so, in the interest of simplicity, I have subsumed the characteristics of the last element of writing under the term ‘meaning.’ De Certeau’s translator also indicates the importance of this term in his translation of the sentence that introduces the term, though his translation slightly skews the meaning of the whole original sentence in order to capture the importance of the one term; compare the translation above to the original French: “Au contraire, le jeu scripturaire, production d’un système, espace de formalisation, a pour ‘sens’ de renvoyer à la réalité dont il a été distingué *en vue de la changer*” (de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien* [Gallimard, 1980] 236-236).

De Certeau only gives one example to illustrate his conception of the process of writing, Daniel Defoe's (c.1660-1931) *Robinson Crusoe*.¹⁰⁸

This novel combines the three elements I distinguished above: the island that isolates a place of one's own [*blank page*], the production of a system of objects by a dominant subject [*text*], and the transformation of a 'natural' world ['meaning']. . . . [T]he awakening of Robinson to the capitalist and conquering task of writing his island is inaugurated by the decision to write his diary, to give himself in that way a space in which he can master time and things, and to thus constitute for himself, along with the blank page, an initial island in which he can produce what he wants.

(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 136)

De Certeau continues his quest for orality hidden in writing in his next chapter, "*Citations de Voix*" ["Quotations of Voices"]. These "quotations" are the traces of orality that remain concealed in the text; however, not only is orality concealed in the text but, by consequence, the speaker's voice is hidden there as well:

The problem of the speaker and his identity became acute with the breakdown of the world that was assumed to be spoken and speaking; who speaks when there is no longer a divine Speaker who founds every particular enunciation? The question was apparently settled by the system that furnished the subject with a place guaranteed and measured by his scriptural production.¹⁰⁹ In a laissez-faire economy where isolated and competitive activities are supposed to contribute to a general rationality, the work of writing gives birth to both the product and its author. Henceforth, in theory, there is no longer any need for voices in these industrious workshops. Thus the classical age had as its primary task the creation of scientific and technical 'languages' separated from nature and intended to transform it . . . each of these systems of 'writing' (*écritures*) places its "bourgeois" producers beyond doubt and confirms the conquests that this autonomous instrument allows them to make on the body of the world.

(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 156-157)

¹⁰⁸De Certeau offers numerous examples that illustrate what is essentially this same conceptualization of this process of writing, such as the evolution of cartography, the writing of the lives of saints, and Freud's studies of history, in his book published five years prior to *L'Invention du quotidien, L'Écriture de l'histoire* (Gallimard, 1975), translated as *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (Columbia University Press, 1988).

¹⁰⁹ De Certeau is referring to his concept of the procedures of writing from his previous chapter in *L'Invention du quotidien* discussed above.

De Certeau moves on to the consequences that this system of writing, this “scriptural economy,” has for oral works that can no longer exist in an oral tradition. De Certeau calls these oral works “fables” [*fables*]. These fables become the objects of study for “heterologies”

[“*hétérologies*”],¹¹⁰ or “sciences of the other” [*sciences de l’autre*], which must “write the voice” [*écrire la voix*] and thereby speak *for* the oral works:

The heterological operations seem to depend on the fulfillment of two conditions: an object, defined as a ‘fable,’ and an instrument, translation. To define the position of the other (primitive, religious, mad, childlike, or popular) as a ‘fable’ is not merely to identify it with ‘what speaks’ (*fari*), but with speech that ‘does not know’ what it says. When it is serious, enlightened or scientific analysis does indeed assume that something essential is expressed in the myths produced by primitive, the dogmas of the believer, the child’s babbling, the language of dreams or the gnomic conversations of common people, but it also assumes that these forms of speech do not understand what they say that is important. The ‘fable’ is thus a word full of meaning, but what it says ‘implicitly’ becomes ‘explicit’ only through scholarly exegesis. By this trick, research accords itself in advance, through its very object, a certain necessity and location.

(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 160)

The rest of de Certeau’s quest for orality continues in this apophatic way by examining the problems inherent in the methods used to record orality. He does not *specifically* find orality in his search written in *L’Invention du quotidien*, but he shows us ways to go in search of it for ourselves. However, in his chapter “*Manières de parler*” [“Manners of Speaking”] in *La Fable mystique*, de Certeau does present some positive characterizations of how orality, specifically the orality of mystics, functions in its own writing:

The smallest semantic unit is split. There are two *in place of one*. In other words, one is two: this is the first principle. A dichotomy organizes the elemental, which takes on by this fact the status of an in-between [*entre-deux*]¹¹¹: an in-

¹¹⁰ A collection of de Certeau’s translated (Brian Massumi) essays was posthumously collected and published as *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* (Manchester University Press, 1986). In an introduction to his book on de Certeau, Ben Highmore remarks: “There is no French equivalent to [*Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*], though Michel de Certeau, *Histoire et psychanalyse entre science et fiction* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002) contains many of the same essays” (Highmore, Ben. *Michel de Certeau: Analysing Culture*. New York: Continuum, 2006, vii).

¹¹¹ The French term *entre-deux* literally means “between two.” De Certeau uses much paronomasia in this passage, which is referenced in the footnotes below.

between speech [*entredit*] and an interdiction [*interdit*].¹¹² That ‘unit’ [*unité*]¹¹³ therefore offers us the quasi-abstract formula for ‘excess’ [*excès*]¹¹⁴: it is not reducible to either of the two components, nor to a third thing, which is precisely what is missing. It exceeds language. It points toward an outside, like so many raised fingers in mannerist painting. An original split makes the ‘ontological’ statement, which would be ‘said’ of the intended thing, impossible. . . . What must be said cannot be said except by the shattering of the word. An internal split makes words admit or confess to the mourning that separates them from what they show.

(de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 144)

However, when such mystic writing is approached with the label “mystic” in mind or when it is explicated as mystic writing that cannot speak for itself, the actions above are obscured, “opacified”:

In classical theory, the sign is double-faceted [*biface*]: it represents a thing . . . and it has a reality of its own [*il a réalité propre*]. . . . By the first aspect, it is transparent; by the second, opaque. Thus the letters representing a meaning can be considered in their materiality; in that case, they cause the meaning to be forgotten or to disappear. Paradoxical by nature, the sign uncovers and hides [*le signe découvre et il cache*]. In point of fact, a relation of inverse proportion governs these two poles: the appearance of the thing signified increases as that of the sign-as-thing [*signe-comme-chose*] diminishes. The more attention directed to the sign-as-thing, the less one recognizes the thing represented in it. Now, as W. V. Quine [(1908-2000)] has noted, the opacification of the sign (and thereby the erasing of the system of reference) is the result of whatever draws the attention back to the reality (be it phonetic, graphic, linguistic, etc.) of the sign. Thus quotation marks or statements of propositional attitudes . . . which are the equivalent of quotation marks . . . constitute what Quine calls ‘referentially opaque contexts.’ Put in quotation marks, the word becomes opaque; it is looked at as a thing and no longer as a sign.

That is what occurs in the mystic phrases [i.e., mystic writing labeled as such]. The use of the adjective ‘mystic’ already bears witness to this fact.¹¹⁵ As we have already seen, that adjective, applied to a noun . . . signifies ‘as the mystics understand or use it.’ It plays the role of quotation marks. It turns the attention away from the thing being represented and focuses it on the way the word is being used, that is, on the sign-as-thing. It therefore opacifies the sign. By its action alone, it tends to make the thing signified disappear in favor of the

¹¹² De Certeau puns further with the combination of *entredit* and *interdit*.

¹¹³ The French word *unité* can mean both “unity” and “unit.”

¹¹⁴ The French word *excès* can mean “excess” or “surplus”; however, it is often used in phrases such as “*excès de langage* [immoderate language] and “*commettre des excès de langage*” [to use strong language].

¹¹⁵ Recall de Certeau’s history of the term *mystic* discussed earlier in this dissertation.

signifier. It is the producer of a secret [*C'est un producteur de secret*]. The 'phrases' . . . are to be considered a part of this metalinguistic action (metalinguistic in the sense that the adjective 'mystic' is a term that speaks of language itself and not of things); they, too, direct the attention back to the words as being unable to signify. . . . the attention is diverted . . . in order to underline the status each word has of not being able to state what it intends. The mystic phrases therefore remove from these words their designative value and, in doing so, also remove their signlike transparency. . . . Remaining are words turned in such a way as to show their own status: an impotence [*une impuissance*].

(de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 144-145)

The reader can see in the passages from *L'Invention du quotidien* discussed above de Certeau's implicit reapplication of his notions of "cut out" and "turn over" to the procedures of writing. "Cut out" [*découper*] refers to the removal of practices from their milieu, albeit an indefinite milieu, in order to study them. Not only does the removal isolate them for study, but it reforms the "fragment" into its own whole. Moreover, the "cut out" makes the practice under examination foreign and exotic, something to be domesticated by theory, an enigma to be made familiar through explanation. "Turn over" [*retourner*] inverts the practices that have been alienated by the "cut out." When "cut out," the practice appears to be in need of explanation, in need of a theory; but, when "turned over," the theory is made to come from the practice — the practice, first made foreign, is now made familiar in order to give the explanation. The practice then becomes "the element that illuminates theory and sustains discourse" (de Certeau, *Practice*, 63). Orality is treated by a heterologist, e.g., by one who *formally* studies the speech of a mystic as "mystic" speech, as something in need of explanation, and the heterologist cuts it out of its milieu by writing it into his or her own text. Once orality has been written into a text, once it has been newly contextualized, it is explained there according to a textual logic (rhetoric, grammar, technical language, the science of a discipline, tropes, etc.) and thereby made to conform to the rule of the text.

In the passages from *La Fable mystique*, De Certeau explains mystic speech as working exactly opposite to the process of “cut out” and “turn over”: The mystic does not remove a term or phrase from its milieu and qualify it out of context, only to return it to that context that the term has been modified to appropriately fit; rather, the mystic creates hidden milieus that lie behind the “transparent” signs of language, which far too often become concealed by the “opacification” of the signs that occurs when someone else tries to *speak for* the mystic in his or her own writing, i.e., when someone tries his or her own cut out and turn over.

In his two texts, de Certeau searches for the voices that have been concealed by the practices of writing. He tries to find a discourse for the now non-discursive action of speaking — a non-discursive discourse. Aphoristically, of course, de Certeau’s work will inform our own search here for the writing of discourses that conceal and efface themselves in order to open up spaces for actions and practices — discourses that *do*. However, to avoid as much as possible any cut out’s or turn over’s of our own, the texts that follow will be allowed to speak for themselves; the many ways that they *might* speak will be shown; and the texts will be allowed to speak with each other.

Paramnesias: The Forgotten Word, The Forgetting World

Lift up thin herte unto God with a meek steryng of love; and mene Himself, and none of His goodes. And therto loke thee lothe to thenk on ought bot on Hymself, so that nought worche in thi witte ne in thi wille bot only Himself. And do that in thee is to forgete alle the creatures that ever God maad and the werkes of hem, so that thi thought ne thi desire be not directe ne streche to any of hem, neither in general ne in special. Bot lat hem be, and take no kepe to hem.

(Gallacher [as editor], *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 30)

Lift up your heart to God with a meek stirring of love; and mean him himself and none of creations. And observe that you loathe to think about anything but him himself, so that nothing is at work in your wit or your will but only he himself. And to do that in yourself is to forget all the creatures that God ever made and his

works, so that your thought and your desire be not directed nor extended to any of them, neither generally nor especially. But let them be, and pay no heed to them.¹¹⁶

Lift up your heart to God with a gentle stirring of love. Focus on him alone. Want him, and not anything he's made. Think on nothing but him. Don't let anything else run through your mind and will. Here's how. Forget what you know. Forget everything God made and everybody who exists and everything that's going on in the world, until your thoughts and emotions aren't focused on reaching toward anything, not in a general way and not in any particular way. Let them be. For the moment, don't care about anything.

(*The Cloud of Unknowing* with the *Book of Privy Counsel*, 11)

Coming to know God by unknowing the world — that is the teaching objective proclaimed by the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Book of Privy Counsel*. These texts are spiritual guides for contemplation, which is the practice promoted in the texts for bringing God into one's heart and mind. Contemplation is indeed a practice, for it is described in the text as something one must practice every day in order to succeed. Contemplation is practiced when a “cloud of unknowing” is placed between one and God and when a “cloud of forgetting” is placed between one and the world. This “cloud of unknowing” is to be essentially a spiritual and mental void emptied of all worldly thought, knowledge, desires,

¹¹⁶ In several instances in this section, I give my “literal” translations of the passages under discussion, which rely heavily on cognates and homophones in hopes of rendering some of the sound of the original along with approximate meanings of individual words, followed by published translations. The published translation here is from Carmen Acevedo Butcher's *The Cloud of Unknowing with The Book of Privy Counsel* (Shambala, 2009), which

tries to articulate the intimacy between the *Cloud* writer and his audience. As always, I stay as close to the original as possible, gently transforming it, pass after pass, into the English we speak today. I also want irresistible prose. This may sound far-fetched when discussing a book of devotional literature, but it is a requirement in my mind, because the original text is simply beautiful. To be true to this Middle English prose, I have to imitate its ‘pull.’ So I snub obsolete, antiquated diction, not wanting to bore the intelligent reader, and I don't choose two words if one will do. This simplicity would have pleased our medieval author.

(Butcher xxvi)

Butcher's translation thus conveys overall meanings and a true sense of the text much more effectively than my cribs, but I give the original language with two translations to emphasize specific points in the original and still allow the works to *speak* as freely as possible. See the section “Not Translating Word-for-Word but Sense-by-Sense” (xxvi-xxviii) in Butcher's text for more on the special considerations necessary for translating the works of Anonymous.

memories, and awareness and in which, once emptied, one waits with nothing but a “naked intent for God,” a simple longing for God. One takes everything emptied from this cloud of unknowing and places it in a “cloud of forgetting,” which is spiritual and mental space filled with one’s experience of the world and which stands between one and the actual physical world.

In order to create these two clouds, one must literally “forget what [one] know[s].” One must forget everything and everybody, which, though it may seem easy to some, is a very difficult task, especially when one *thinks* about it. The anonymous author advises one who is in the early stages of contemplation to overcome this difficulty by — oddly enough — concentrating:

Focus on the God who made you and ransomed you and led you to this work. Think of nothing else. Even these thoughts are superfluous. Instead, do what pleases you. You only need a naked intent for God. When you long for him, that’s enough.

If you want to gather this focus into one word, making it easier to grasp, select a little word of one syllable, not two. The shorter the word, the more it helps the work of the spirit. *God* or *love* works well. Pick one of these or any other word you like, as long as it is one syllable. Fasten it to your heart. Fix your mind on it permanently, so nothing can dislodge it.

This word will protect you. It will be your shield and spear, whether you ride out into peace or conflict. Use it to beat on the dark cloud of unknowing above you. With it, knock down every thought, and they’ll lie down under the cloud of forgetting below you. Whenever an idea interrupts you to ask, “What do you want?” answer with this one word. If the thought continues — if, for example, it offers out of its profound erudition to lecture you on your chosen word, expounding its etymology and connotations for you — tell it that you refuse to analyze the word, that you want your word whole, not broken into pieces. If you’re able to stick to your purpose, I’m positive the thought will go away.

(The Cloud of Unknowing with the Book of Privy Counsel, 24-25)

Here one can see discourse, not only the text itself but its command to focus on one word and its command to “speak” to thought, being put to use in the service of practicing the know-how of knowing God. One who is learning to contemplate begins with the discourse of the text, the instruction book for contemplating, which itself tells its reader to take hold of discourse, first by

acknowledging it in its entirety and then winnowing it down to one word on which one focuses as a tool for coming to know God. Once one has taken possession of this word and “fastened it to their heart,” it becomes a protection against thoughts:

yif any thought prees upon thee to aske thee what thou woldest have, answer him with no mo wordes bot with this o worde. And yif he profre thee of his grete clergie to expounne thee that worde and to telle thee the condicions of that worde, sey him that thou wilt have it al hole, and not broken ne undon.

(Gallacher [as editor], *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 38)

if any thought presses upon you to ask you what you would have, answer it with no more words but with this one word. And if it offers you out of its great scholarship to expound the word for you and to tell you the conditions of that word, say to that thought that you would have it whole and not broken nor undone.

Whenever an idea interrupts you to ask, “What do you want?” answer with this one word. If the thought continues — if, for example, it offers out of its profound erudition to lecture you on your chosen word, expounding its etymology and connotations for you — tell it that you refuse to analyze the word, that you want your word whole, not broken into pieces.

(*The Cloud of Unknowing with the Book of Privy Counsel*, 25)

With this one intact piece of discourse, with this one word, the reader is to defend him or herself from thought by *speaking* to thought. When thought *asks* [*aske*] him or her who does the good work of contemplation, then he or she must *answer* [*answere*] it with the one solid word. When thought tries to *expound* [*expounne*] the significance of the one word and *tell* [*telle*] him or her about the word, then the contemplator must *say* [*sey*] that the word is not to be divided. First, the reading contemplator moves from the discourse of the text to his or her own discourse, which is narrowed down to one word; next, the word itself is deprived of its meanings and connotations yet still kept whole; then, the contemplator moves to the voicing of the one word against thought in order to defeat it, which opens up the space in the cloud of unknowing for contact with God.

Indeed, once the contemplator focuses on one word, its very nature, its very meaning must be released in order to transform the word into a physical object:

I maad no force, thof thou haddest nowondayes none other meditacions of thin owne wrechidnes, ne of the goodnes of God . . . bot soche as thou mayst have in this worde synne and in this worde God, or in soche other, whiche as the list; not brekyng ne expounyng thees wordes with coryousté of witte, in beholdyng after the qualitees of thees wordes, as thou woldest by that beholdyng encrees thi devocion. I trowe it schuld never be so in this caas and in this werk. Bot holde hem alle hole theese wordes; and mene synne a lump, thou wost never what, none other thing bot thiself. Me think that in this blynde beholdyng of synne, thus conjelyd in a lumpe (none other thing than thiself) it schuld be no nede to bynde a woder thing then thou schuldest be in this tyme.

(Gallacher [as editor], *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 64-65)

I would make no fuss thereof, if you had nowadays no other meditations than on your own wretchedness or on the goodness of God . . . but such as you might have in the word *sin* and in this word *God*, or in such other, which pleased you, not breaking or expounding these words with curiosity of wit, in searching for the qualities of these words, as if you would by that searching increase your devotion. I trust it should never be so in this case and in this work. But hold all these words whole, and mean sin as a lump, which you know as nothing other than yourself. I think that in this blind beholding of sin, thus congealed as a lump (none other than yourself), there should be no need to bind a madder thing than you should be in this time.

I don't care if your meditations on your own sinfulness or on God's goodness are reduced to one simple word like *sin* or *God*, or any other you choose. But don't analyze these words or look up their etymologies. That clever display of wit won't increase your devotion. Your ability to reason is never helpful in contemplation.

Instead, embrace the word whole. If your word is *sin*, focus on sin as a lump, impenetrable to your mind, but none other than yourself. I believe when you're engaged in this dark, simple awareness of sin as a hard lump (synonymous with you), there could be no more insane creature than you are then — you'll doubt your ability to live outside a strait jacket.

(*The Cloud of Unknowing with The Book of Privy Counsel*, 83-84)

As the text progresses, one can see that this one-word discourse begins to dissolve even itself as the word loses its meaning and everyday usage. The word becomes a lump [*lump*];¹¹⁷ the word

¹¹⁷ The origin of *lump* is uncertain and has only been traced back to the fourteenth century (Anonymous's period): [*Lump*] is not found in the early stages of the Germanic languages but may be from a Germanic base meaning 'shapeless piece'; Danish *lump* 'lump', Norwegian and Swedish dialect *lump* 'block, log', and Dutch *lomp* 'rag' are comparable forms. The word was applied in disparagement meaning 'heavy, dull person' from the end of the 16th century.

(*The Oxford Dictionary of Word Histories*, Oxford U. P., 2002)

here “becomes flesh”; it becomes a tangible thing that is inseparable from the contemplator, though it is to be voiced:

And fele synne a lumpe, thou wost never what, bot none other thing than thiself.
And crye than goostly ever upon one: “Synne, synne synne; oute, oute, oute!”
This goostly crie is betyr lernid of God by the proef then of any man by worde.
For it is best whan it is in pure spirit, withoutyn specyal thought or any
pronounsing of worde; bot yif it be any seeldom tyme, when for habundaunce of
spiryt it brestith up into worde, so that the body and the soule ben bothe fillid with
sorow and kumbryng
of synne.

(Gallacher [as editor], *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 68)

And feel sin as a lump, which you know as nothing other than yourself. And cry more spiritually than ever: “Sin, sin, sin; out, out, out!” This spiritual cry is better learned from God by trial and error than from any man’s word. For it is best when it is in pure spirit, without special thought or any pronouncing of words; but if it be a rare time, when from abundance of spirit it burst out into words, so that the body and the soul be both filled with sorrow and the burden of sin.

So feel sin as a lump, inscrutable to reason, but none other than who you are. Then cry out in your spirit, “Sin, sin, sin; help, help, help!” It’s better for you to learn this spiritual cry from God, by experience, than from my all-too-human words. It’s also best if you can ‘shout’ this word silently, without actual thought or sound. On rare occasions, however, your body and soul will fill to overflowing with the sorrow and burden of sin, and words may burst from you then.

(*The Cloud of Unknowing with The Book of Privy Counsel*, 91)

In her article “Paradox upon Paradox: Using and Abusing Language in *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Related Texts” (*Parergon* 22.2 [2005] pp. 31-51), which is also discussed in the last chapter of this dissertation, Cheryl Taylor notes how the works of Anonymous, particularly in the passages cited above, enact the practice of contemplation in the language of the texts themselves:

A final example of contemplative *mimesis* is the passage in *The Cloud* that recommends attaching ‘a litil worde of o silable’¹¹⁸ [a little word of one syllable] to the divinely-inspired ‘steryng of loue’ [stirring of love] which is the essence of the ‘werk’ [work]. This single syllable — ‘GOD’ [God], ‘LOUE’ [Love] — integrates all the dichotomies, hierarchies, and multiplicities in the author’s

¹¹⁸ Taylor cites the Middle English from Phyllis Hodgson’s *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Counselling* (Oxford, 1944). My own citations of the Middle English are from Patrick J. Gallacher’s *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Western Michigan University, 1997).

doctrine. The passage that typifies both his parsimony about language and his drive to unity: ‘sey him þat þou wilt haue it al hole, & not broken ne vndon’ [say to him that you will have it all whole, and not broken nor undone]. The discussion is in fact unified on repetitions of ‘worde’ [word], and further demonstrates the text’s resistance to expansionary rhetoric. ‘Worde’ is first linked with warrior metaphors to create *repetitio*, but later imitates the mental repetition being taught. As the distracting thought is progressively silenced, both textual ‘worde’ and ‘worde’ as contemplative vehicle merge into divine stillness. The many repetitions suggest, not rhetorical abundance, but the ultimate futility of ‘wordes’ in contrast with that stillness.

(Taylor 41-42)

Taylor argues that Anonymous’s discourse becomes action through mimesis. The reader as contemplator takes a single syllable word that is first “linked with warrior metaphors,” such as: “This word will protect you. It will be your shield and spear, whether you ride out into peace or conflict” (Butcher [as translator] 24) [“This worde schal be thi scheeld and thi spere, whether thou ridest on pees or on were” (Gallacher [as editor], *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 38)]. The word is used by the contemplator to create “*repetitio*” by repeatedly keeping thoughts at bay with it, which “later imitates the mental repetition being taught.” As the contemplator increases his or her abilities in contemplation by progressively silencing thought with the repetition of the one word, “both textual ‘worde’ and ‘worde’ as contemplative vehicle merge into divine stillness.” The word of Anonymous’s text and the word as weapon against thought become one as thought ceases — defeated by the word — thus requiring no further utterance. “The many repetitions suggest, not rhetorical abundance, but the ultimate futility of ‘wordes’ in contrast with that stillness,” for it is the repeating of the word as weapon that leads to its own impotence once its foe (thought) is defeated.

The *discourse that does* functions in Anonymous’s work thus: Beginning with the discourse of the text itself, the reader begins the good work of contemplation by learning how to manipulate his or her own discourse, which is narrowed down to a one-word discourse. That

one word is then deprived of its meanings and connotations, yet still kept wholly intact, and is used as a defense by being voiced, first aloud and then gradually silently, against thought. By defeating thought, the need of the word and words is voided, and a space is allowed to open up in that void, the cloud of unknowing, in which contact and eventually union with God can be made.

Parodies: Para-meta-pseudo-non-philosopher

Det er, for at beskrive det billedligt, som hvis der for en Forfatter indløb en Skrivfeil, og denne blev sig bevidst som saadan — maaskee var det dog egentligen ingen Feil, men i en langt høiere Forstand et væsentligt Medhøørende i hele Fremstillingen — det er som hvis nu denne Skrivfeil vilde gjøre Oprør mod Forfatteren, af Had til ham formene ham at rette, og i vanvittig Trods sige til ham: nei, jeg vil ikke udslettes, jeg vil staae som et Vidne mod Dig, et Vidne om, at Du er en maadelig Forfatter.¹¹⁹

(Kierkegaard, *Sygdommen til Døden*, 227)

It is, to describe it figuratively, as if a written error loped into an author's work, and then became aware of itself as such — though perhaps it was actually not an error, but in a much higher understanding an essential piece belonging in the whole production — it is as if now this written error wants to rebel against the author, from hate of him to forbid him to correct it, and in insane defiance say to him: no, I will not be erased, I will stand as a witness against you, and a witness that you are an author-of-the-month.¹²⁰

Figuratively speaking, it is as if an error slipped into an author's writing and the error became conscious of itself as an error — perhaps it actually was not a mistake but in a much higher sense an essential part of the whole production — and now this error wants to mutiny against the author, out of hatred toward him, forbidding him to correct it and in maniacal defiance saying to him: No, I refuse to be erased; I will stand as a witness against you, a witness that you are a second-rate author.

(Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 74)

¹¹⁹ The word that is translated here as “author-of-the-month” in my translation and “second-rate” in the one below it (Howard and Edna Hong) is *maadelig*, which derives from *maade* (*måde* in the modern reformed spelling), which is related to the English *mode* as a Latin derivative. The term *maadelig* is untranslatable directly into English but could be rendered roughly via cognates as “mode-ly” or perhaps with the French phrase now common in English “à la mode,” in the pejorative sense of being overly fashionable, part of a fad, and thereby mediocre or “moderate,” a word which is also related to *maadelig*. Compare a sarcastic usage of the German *modisch*.

¹²⁰ Again, I chose to include my own more literal translation in this section on discourse. The published translation cited above is from Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, (Princeton University Press, 1983).

In the section of *The Sickness Unto Death* from which the passage above is taken, Kierkegaard is making an analogy between the concept of this error in an author's writing and the concept of an eternal afterlife to a person who is in one of Kierkegaard's types of despair, not to will to be oneself. A person who despairs not to will to be oneself lives life spitefully, as if he or she is evidence against the goodness of creation by being such a miserable being. This person cannot conceive of an afterlife because it would provide evidence that, no matter how miserable life is, all is rewarded in heaven. The situation of this person is analogous to the authorial error that becomes conscious of itself and then believes (or wills) itself not to be an error. As such, the error stands as a witness against the validity of the authorship that created it.

Several points of interests lie in the passage above: the notion that error may be "an essential part of [a] whole production"; the notion of a self-conscious discourse *speaking* against its author; and the notion of an author who writes about a person who does not will oneself to be oneself in despair, yet that same author repeatedly willed his authorship to be another by inventing numerous pseudonyms. These three points of interest have great bearing on Kierkegaard's philosophy and Kierkegaard as a philosopher; however, was he really a philosopher?

In his book on Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard* (Routledge, 1982), Alastair Hannay finds it pertinent to take up this question in the second section of his first chapter (the first was primarily a biography of Kierkegaard):

Whatever his historical importance as cultural innovator or iconoclast, Søren Kierkegaard is not normally reckoned among the major philosophers. He is not even widely held to be a philosopher at all, or not a very good one, least of all by those for whom the hallmark of true philosophy is the systematic and economical statement of a well-defined thesis and supporting argument.

(Hannay 8)

On his next few pages, Hannay attempts to classify and/or qualify Kierkegaard as some kind of philosopher, detailing the attempts of others to do the same by calling Kierkegaard a “philosophical failure,” “paraphilosophical thinker,” “philosopher of religion,” and “religious thinker,” before settling, more or less, on Kierkegaard as a meta-philosopher with paraphilosophical goals. What Hannay means by his classification is that Kierkegaard understood that philosophy had limits, worked on and with philosophy from both outside and inside those limits, and, finally, had as his goals concepts and achievements that would lie far beyond the reach of philosophy.

Olivia Blanchette argues a similar point in her article “The Silencing of Philosophy” collected in the *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Fear and Trembling and Repetition* (Mercer 1993) 29-65, though it is specified to the case of *Fear and Trembling*:

Philosophy, especially Hegelian philosophy, has a way of going on about things. It tends to absorb one thing and then go further until it has absorbed everything in its discourse. But Kierkegaard, or, if one prefers, Johannes de Silentio,¹²¹ thought there was at least one thing in human existence philosophy could not absorb, namely, faith. . . . *Fear and Trembling* is a polemic against philosophy that uses philosophy to overcome philosophy, largely Hegelian philosophy, which is both culprit and coadjutor in the task of silencing philosophy. . . . for, while it is Hegelian philosophy that is aimed at, it is also Hegelian philosophy that provides the framework for the argument.

(Blanchette 29-30)

Blanchette asserts that Kierkegaard must employ systemics himself when attempting to modify and/or dismantle systematic philosophies. Even when attempting to show philosophy’s shortcomings and philosophers’ “failures,” Kierkegaard has to do much of his work in the confines of philosophy with philosophical means. Blanchette’s ultimate claim in her article is that the goal of *Fear and Trembling* is to silence philosophy:

Johannes [de Silentio] has demonstrated how . . . a transcendence of meaning is philosophically necessary. When it confronts faith, philosophy has to will its own

¹²¹ Johannes de Silentio, literally “John of Silence,” is the pseudonymous author of *Fear and Trembling*.

silence. Such a silence, however, is not a denial of philosophy as disclosure. It is a disclosure of the radical openness to faith at the heart of philosophy and, at the same time, of infinite resignation as the radical incapacity to penetrate faith's sphere philosophically. Only a Johannes *de Silentio* could demonstrate this in the face of all attempts to go further by Hegelian philosophy.

(Blanchette 65)

Where philosophy encounters faith, it must bow down in silence, not because it has nothing to say, but because silence says it all — that faith is beyond its abilities to explain, but, à la Socrates, the only thing philosophy knows when it comes to faith is that it knows nothing.

Para-, meta-, pseudo-, or non-philosopher, Kierkegaard created a corpus of writing that entered into discourse with philosophy. The pseudonymous portion of this corpus was fashioned on Kierkegaard's notion of "indirect communication" [*indirekte Meddelelse*], which is sometimes referred to as "communication in reflection." Described here most briefly, Kierkegaard's notion of indirect communication is an "art" of communication in which the author adopts the point of view of his reader, which is dissimilar to his own, in order to work through problems from the reader's perspective and thereby persuade the reader much more effectively than if the author had *argued* from his own perspective. Kierkegaard often metaphorically referred to this method as "sneaking up on the reader from behind," and the use of this method of "indirect communication" necessitated his pseudonyms in order to disassociate his own person from the writings and allow them to stand on their own, not necessarily merely to conceal his own identity but rather more to create another author, as Louis Mackey notes in his text *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971):

A Kierkegaardian pseudonym is a *persona*, an imaginary person created by the author for artistic purposes, not a *nom de plume*, a fictitious name used to protect his personal identity from the threats and embarrassments of publicity. When Kierkegaard signed his books with impossible names like Johannes de Silentio (John of Silence) [(pseudonym for *Fear and Trembling*)] and Vigilius Haufeniensis (Watchman of Copenhagen) [(pseudonym for *The Concept of Anxiety*)], no one in the gossip little world of Danish letters had any doubt about

their origin. Nor did he mean they should; his purpose was not mystification but distance. By refusing to answer for his writings he detached them from his personality so as to let their form protect the freedom that was their theme.

(Mackey 247)

But Kierkegaard did not stop his discourse with philosophy with his pseudonymous works, for he published, often concurrently, works under his own name. The majority of these works under his own name were “direct communications” [direkte *Meddeleses*] called *Discourses*¹²² [*Taler*],¹²³ though he also published many reviews, editorials, and memoirs, both under his name and pseudonymously. Issuing pseudonymous works almost simultaneously with those under his own name became a practice that Kierkegaard continued throughout his life, as he noted in *Om min Forfatter-Virksomhed* (1851)¹²⁴ [*On my Work as an Author*]¹²⁵:

‘Direct communication’ is: to communicate the truth directly; ‘communication in reflection’ is: *to deceive into truth*. But since the movement is to arrive at the simple, the communication in turn must sooner or later end in direct communication. It began *maieutically* with esthetic works, and the whole

¹²² Noting the word *Tale* [discourse] or its derivatives in the Danish titles, which are sometimes not translated as “discourse(s)” in the English titles, see: *Two Edifying Discourses* [*To opbyggelige Taler*], *Three Edifying Discourses* [*Tre opbyggelige Taler*], *Four Edifying Discourses* [*Fire opbyggelige Taler*] (1843); *Two Edifying Discourses* [*To opbyggelige Taler*], *Three Edifying Discourses* [*Tre opbyggelige Taler*], *Four Edifying Discourses* [*Fire opbyggelige Taler*] (1844); *Three Addresses on Imagined Occasions* [*Tre Taler ved tænkte Leiligheder*] (1845); *Edifying Discourses in Different Spirits* [*Opbyggelige Taler i forskellig Aand*], *Works of Love: Some Christian Reflections in the Form of Discourses* [*Kjerlighedens Gjerninger. Nogle christelige Overveielser i Talers Form*] (1847); *Christian Discourses* [*Christelige Taler*] (1848); *The Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air: Three devotional discourses* [*Lilien paa Marken og Fuglen under Himlen. Tre gudelige Taler*], “The High Priest” — “The Publican” — and “The Woman taken in Sin”: three addresses at Holy Communion on Fridays [“Ypperstepræsten” — “Tolderen” — “Synderinden”, tre Taler ved Altergangen om Fredagen] (1849); *An Edifying Discourse* [*En opbyggelig Tale*] (1850); *Two Discourses at Holy Communion on Fridays* [*To Taler ved Altergangen om Fredagen*] (1851); and *God’s Unchangeability: A Discourse* [*Guds Uforanderlighed. En Tale*] (1855).

¹²³ The word *Taler* is the plural form of *Tale* “discourse” and is cognate with English *talk*.

¹²⁴ The translation of the text in English is titled *The Point of View* (Princeton University Press, 1998). The Danish title could also be roughly translated as *On my Effect as an Author* or *On my Activity as an Author*.

¹²⁵ Louis Mackey’s *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971) and D. Anthony Storm’s *Commentary on Kierkegaard* (online) [<http://www.sorenkierkegaard.org/index.html>], inform some of my work in the following section, especially with guidance to particular passages of Kierkegaard’s, though the ideas are my own and all passages are cited from their original sources. In fact, upon examination of D. Anthony’s *Commentary on Kierkegaard*, it is evident that he too was heavily informed by Mackey’s work, especially in guidance to particular passages of Kierkegaard’s, and Anthony often cites the exact same passages as Mackey though from a newer translation.

pseudonymous production is *maieutic* in nature. Therefore, these works were also pseudonymous, whereas the directly religious — which from the beginning was present in the glimmer of an indication — carried my name. The directly religious was present from the very beginning; *Two Upbuilding Discourses* (1843) are in fact concurrent with *Either/Or*. And in order to safeguard the concurrence of the directly religious, every pseudonymous work was accompanied concurrently by a little collection of ‘upbuilding discourses’ until *Concluding Postscript* appeared, which poses the issue, which is ‘the issue’ *kat’ exochen* [in the eminent sense] of the whole authorship: ‘becoming a Christian.’
(Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 7-8)

However, Kierkegaard remarked many times in his life, especially in his works on his own authorial method,¹²⁶ that he had hoped that these *Discourses* would provide earnest foundations that could form dialectics with his pseudonymous works. Louis Mackey articulates this point well and stresses it as being “of crucial importance for his literary program”:

The presence in the Kierkegaardian corpus of these subclasses of direct communication [(works under his own name)] is of crucial importance for his literary program. The direct writings provide the ultimate *what* and the ultimate *why* of the pseudonymous books, while these latter ([works under his own name]) supply the *how*. The edifying discourses . . . define the religious end to which the aesthetic and philosophical works are the means. And conversely, the distinction between pseudonymous and direct writings establishes the independence of the poetic production. Because they can be opposed to the known intent of Kierkegaard, the works of the pseudonymous *personae* are protected against biographical and psychological snooper. Neither symptoms nor simulacra of any living person, they stand by themselves and take their autonomous literary effect.

(Mackey 249)

As Mackey does in his phrase “of crucial importance for his literary program,” Kierkegaard himself in his journals stresses the need for a separation between his own works and those of his pseudonyms as being “a very important point in the whole productivity”:

I began with *Either/Or* and two upbuilding discourses; now it ends, after the whole upbuilding series — with a little esthetic essay [*The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress* (1848)]. It expresses: that it was the upbuilding, the

¹²⁶ See: *Synspunktet for min Forfatter-Virksomhed. En ligefrem Meddelelse, Rapport til Historien* (written 1848, posthumously published), [*The Point of View for my Work as an Author: A Direct Communication, A Report to History*] and *Om min Forfatter-Virksomhed* (1851) [*On My Work as a Author*], as well as his journals.

religious, that should advance, and that now the esthetic has been traversed; they are inversely related, or it is something of an inverse confrontation, to show that the writer was not an esthetic author who in the course of time grew older and for that reason became religious. . . .

But there still would have been something lacking if this little article had not come out; the illusion would have been established that it was I who had essentially changed over the years, and then a very important point in the whole productivity would have been lost.

(Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, Vol. VI, 6238)¹²⁷

Though in the beginning of the passage above Kierkegaard claims that *he* (“I”) began with *Either/Or*, which he accompanied with two *Discourses*, the next paragraph of the passage brings into question who *he* is and what is the “very important point in the whole productivity,” which is further complicated in an appendix to *Concluding Unscientific Postscripts to Philosophical Fragments* [*Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift til de filosofiske Smuler* (1846)] “A First and Last Explanation,” which though appended to a pseudonymous work, is supposedly attributed to Kierkegaard, who is credited as having “published” [*Udgiven*] it:

My pseudonymity or polyonymity has not had an *accidental* basis in my person . . . but an *essential* basis in the *production* itself, which, for the sake of the lines and of the psychologically varied differences of the individualities, poetically required an indiscriminateness with regard to good and evil, brokenheartedness and gaiety, despair and overconfidence, suffering and elation, etc. . . . What has been written, then, is mine, but only insofar as I, by means of audible lines, have placed the life-view of the *creating*, poetically actual individuality in his mouth, for my relation is even more remote than that of a poet, who *poetizes* characters and yet in the preface is *himself* the *author*. That is, I am impersonally or personally in the third person as a *souffleur* [prompter] who has poetically produced the *authors*, whose *prefaces* in turn are their productions, as their *names* are also. Thus in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me. I have no opinion about them except as a third party, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader, not the remotest private relation to them, since it is impossible to have that to a doubly reflected communication. . . . My role is the joint role of being the secretary and, quite ironically, the dialectically reduplicated author of the author or the authors.

(Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 625-626)¹²⁸

¹²⁷ This passage is cited from *Christian Discourses* and *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress* (Princeton University Press, 1997). This journal entry was written sometime in the middle of 1848.

However, Kierkegaard also often remarked, and which still holds true today, that though he had hoped that his *Discourses* would be companion pieces to his pseudonymous works, his *Discourses* proved to be much less popular than his pseudonymous works and were often ignored. Thus, this grand lifelong system of discourse among his works written under his own name (*Discourses*) and his pseudonymous works, which Kierkegaard hoped to achieve but believed he had failed to do so, existed in error, and his pseudonymous works, his invented identities, remained only to remind him of that fact.¹²⁹

it is as if an error slipped into an author's writing and the error became conscious of itself as an error — perhaps it actually was not a mistake but in a much higher sense an essential part of the whole production — and now this error wants to mutiny against the author, out of hatred toward him, forbidding him to correct it and in maniacal defiance saying to him: No, I refuse to be erased; I will stand as a witness against you, a witness that you are a second-rate author.

(Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 74)

The texts of Kierkegaard's "other" authors now speak against Kierkegaard as author, for they overshadow the works written under his own name, when he intended them to create an essentially equal dialogue with one another, to have them enter a discourse with one another. The disproportional attention paid to Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works (even in this dissertation), the influence that the pseudonymous works exerted on Existentialism in the twentieth century, and the cliché that the "leap of faith" from the pseudonymous works has become, all bear *witness* to this error and *speak* against the author.

However, that error may be, as *The Sickness Unto Death*'s pseudonymous author *Anti-Climacus* states concerning the error that slipped into the author's writing, "an essential part of the whole production" [*et væsentligt Medhenhørende i hele Fremstillingen*]; or that error may be,

¹²⁸ The translation (Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong) cited here is Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Princeton University Press, 1992).

¹²⁹ The second edition of *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard's first widely-published pseudonymous work, was released in 1849.

as “Kierkegaard” states in *Concluding Unscientific Postscripts* concerning his pseudonymity, “an essential basis in the *production* itself” [*en væsentlig i selve Frembringelsen*]; or that error may be, as Kierkegaard states in his journals concerning the “essential” [*væsentlig*] separation of his own and his pseudonymous work, “a very important point in the whole productivity” [*et meget vigtigt Point i den hele Produktivitet*].¹³⁰ Kierkegaard, then, who so often favored irony in the form of parody, becomes with this error and its realized purposefulness a self-parody: His parody of systematic philosophy (his entire corpus), which itself forms a heterogeneous system, depends upon the differences in discourse to directly and indirectly communicate its ultimate ends, i.e., what lay beyond the reach of philosophy, systematic or not, — Christian faith — yet his “system” fails to do so and exists in error — which ultimately only proves his point! Hence, it is the discourse among the works of this author, the self-relating relations of the works of the author(s), who both wills himself to be himself and wills himself to be another, that must free him of his despair.

Paradoxes: Alienation to Reveal a World

The unmasking of the world — the goal of Franz Kafka’s final aphorism from the collection of *The Zürau Aphorisms*:¹³¹

109 [b].¹³² *Es ist nicht notwendig, daß Du aus dem Haus gehst. Bleib bei
Deinem Tisch und horche. Horche nicht einmal, warte nur. Warte nicht einmal,*

¹³⁰ All of these phrases taken from different points in Kierkegaard’s career have strikingly similar vocabulary and syntax in the Danish.

¹³¹ The beginning of a section on the discourse of aphorisms must begin with a fragment.

¹³² Aphorisms marked with “[b]” are those that were added to the collection by Kafka in the fall of 1920 on pages already containing an aphorism. Kafka drew a horizontal line to divide the old and new aphorism. Kafka himself only marked one aphorism with a letter, 39a, which together with aphorism 39 was discussed here in the previous chapter, though both of those aphorisms were a part of the original collection written from 1917 to 1918. Of the eight aphorisms added to the collection in 1920, one was added to the page containing aphorism 39, which would be referred to as 39 [b] if it were discussed here.

sei völlig still und allein. Anbieten wird sich Dir die Welt zur Entlarvung, sie kann nicht anders, verückt wird sie sich vor Dir winden.

109 [b]. It is not necessary that you go out of your house. Remain by your table and listen. Do not even listen, only wait. Do not even wait, be completely still and alone. The world will offer itself to you to be unmasked; it cannot do otherwise, in ecstasy it will writhe before you.¹³³

109 [b]. It isn't necessary that you leave home. Sit at your desk and listen. Don't even listen, just wait. Don't wait, be still and alone. The whole world will offer itself to you to be unmasked, it can do no other, it will writhe before you in ecstasy.¹³⁴

Indeed, this is the goal of this entire collection of posthumously published aphorisms written between 1918 and 1921 — to remove the mask of the physical world to experience the spiritual one. But, as in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, *The Book of Privy Counsel*, and the works of Kierkegaard, this is a *practice*, one for which the form of the aphorism, with its divided texts and hermeneutical challenges, is well suited. Also as in the aforementioned texts, the way to this goal leads from discourse to action, i.e., a rejection of the earthly experience for a spiritual one; however, rather than negating the world through pure forgetting (Anonymous) or forming lengthy and elaborate heterogeneous systems (Kierkegaard), a practitioner of the method promoted in Kafka's aphorisms achieves this spiritual existence through the discourse of the aphorisms that totally alienates one from the known world, which is only heightened when one returns to the aphorisms with new senses of irony fueled by these alienations.

Alienation is an ever-present theme in Kafka's work, from the metamorphosed Gregor Samsa to the tortured K. However, whereas Kafka's version of alienation is often seen as a literary device and a component of his style, rarely is it considered a means of spiritual

¹³³ Again, I chose to include my more literal translation in this section on discourse. However, in this section I choose to reference my own translations in the discussion of the aphorism, for I believe my translations to be better suited to a discussion of the particulars of each aphorism.

¹³⁴ This translation is from Kafka's *The Zürau Aphorisms*, translated by Michael Hofmann (Schocken, 2006). The numbers of the aphorisms are given rather than the page numbers. Hofmann's translation is the only stand-alone volume of these aphorisms in English.

enlightenment, though that is precisely what it is in *The Zürau Aphorisms*. Without exception, every aphorism in the collection either forces a new perspective of the world on the reader or distorts an old, the effect of which in both cases is an estrangement from the world. To cite just a few:

16. *Ein Käfig ging einen Vogel suchen.*

16. A cage went in search of a bird.

16. A cage went in search of a bird.

34. *Sein Ermatten ist das des Gladiators nach dem Kampf, seine Arbeit war das Weißtünchen eines Winkels in einer Beamtenstube.*

34. His exhaustion is that of a gladiator's after the fight; his work was the whitewashing of a corner in an office.

34. His exhaustion is that of a gladiator after the combat; his labor was the whitewashing of a corner of the wall in his office.

108. *„Dann aber kehrte er zu seiner Arbeit zurück, so wie wenn nichts geschehen wäre.“ Das ist eine Bemerkung, die uns aus einer unklaren Fülle alter Erzählungen geläufig ist, trotzdem sie vielleicht in keiner vorkommt.*

108. ‘Then, however, he went back to his work, as if nothing had happened.’ That is a remark that is familiar to us from an uncertain number of old tales, though perhaps it happens in none.

108. ‘And then he went back to his job, as though nothing had happened.’ A sentence that strikes one as familiar from any number of old stories — though it might not have appeared in any of them.

Like the nightmarish surrealism of his novels and short stories, Kafka's aphorisms always disaffect one to the world. They do not so much highlight its strangeness as they depict the omnipresent permeation of strangeness in the world. However, Kafka warns of seeking

enlightenment by trying to see through the strangeness of the world to what lies beyond, even when trying to overcome its deception:

54 [b]. *Mit stärkstem Licht kann man die Welt auflösen. Vor schwachen Augen wird sie fest, vor noch schwächeren bekommt sie Fäuste, vor noch schwächeren wird sie schamhaft und zerschettert den, der sie anzuschauen wagt.*

54 [b]. With the strongest light one can dissolve the world. Before weak eyes it becomes solid, before still weaker eyes it receive fists, before the weakest eyes it becomes shameful and smashes to bits he who dares to look at.

54 [b]. With a very strong light, one can make the world disappear. Before weak eyes it will become solid; before still weaker eyes, it will acquire fists; and to eyes yet weaker, it will be embarrassed and punch the face of anyone who dares to look at it.¹³⁵

105. *Das Verführungsmittel dieser Welt sowie das Zeichen der Bürgschaft dafür, daß diese Welt nur ein Übergang ist, ist das gleiche. Mit Recht, denn nur so kann uns diese Welt verführen und es entspricht der Wahrheit. Das Schlimme ist aber, daß wir nach geglückter Verführung die Bürgschaft vergessen und so eigentlich das Gute ins Böse, der Blick der Frau in ihr Bett gelockt hat.*

105. The means of seduction of this world as well as the sign of the guarantee that this world is only a transition are the same. Rightly so, for only in this way can the world seduce us and it correspond with the truth. The grave effect is, however, that after the successful seduction we forget the guarantee and thus actually the Good has led us into Evil, the glance of a woman has lured us into bed.

105. The seductiveness of this world and the sign that warrants its transitoriness are one and the same. And rightly so, because only in this way can the world seduce us, and accord with the truth. The grievous thing is that after falling victim to the seduction, we forget the warranty, and so the Good has led us into Evil, the woman's smile has led us into bed with her.

106 [b]. *Kannst Du denn etwas anderes kennen als Betrug? Wird einmal der Betrug vernichtet darfst Du ja nicht hinsehn oder Du wirst zur Salzsäule.*

106 [b]. Can you know anything other than deception? If ever deception were annihilated, you must not look or you will be turned to a pillar of salt.

¹³⁵ Recall the earlier discussion of de Certeau's use of Quine's notion of "the opacified sign."

106 [b]. Can you know anything that is not deception? Once deception was destroyed, you wouldn't be able to look, at the risk of turning into a pillar of salt.

These three aphorisms alert one of the dangers of being deceived into thinking that one can overcome the deceptions and seductions of the world. Aphorism 54 allows for no other eyes than “weak eyes,” which, no matter what the degree of their weakness, will be unsuccessful at “dissolving [*auflösen*] the world.” Aphorism 105 warns one that the very belief in the fact that a spiritual world lies beyond the physical, “that this world is only a transition [*Übergang*],” albeit “true,” still is also a means of deception. Aphorism 106 alerts one that one cannot “know” [*kennen*] anything other than deception, using the German verb *kennen* that translates more specifically as “to be familiar with,” as opposed to *wissen*, which is “to know a fact”; thus, one can never become familiar with non-deception through experience, though one can possibly know or *think* beyond deception. Hence, Kafka argues against trying to work through the physical world, which is deceiving, in order to find the spiritual; instead, he promotes rejection of the world by making it as weird to oneself as can be through the discourse of the aphorism:

8/9.¹³⁶ *Eine stinkende Hündin, reichliche Kindergebärerin, stellenweise schon faulend, die aber in meiner Kindheit mir alles war, die in Treue unaufhörlich mir folgt, die ich zu schlagen mich nicht überwinden kann, vor der ich aber, selbst ihren Atem scheuend, schrittweise nach rückwärts weiche und die mich doch, wenn ich mich nicht anders entscheide, in den schon sichtbaren Mauerwinkel drängen wird, um dort auf mir und mit mir gänzlich zu verwesen, bis zum Ende — ehrt es mich? — das Eiter- und Wurm-Fleisch ihrer Zunge an meiner Hand.*

8/9. A stinking bitch, fruitful bearer of young, in some places already rotting; though she meant everything to me in my childhood and in fidelity followed me incessantly, I cannot even force myself to hit her; in front of her I shy away from even her breath, slink back from her, and if I don't choose otherwise, she will press me into the already visible corner of the wall, in which she will on me and with me completely decompose, until the end — does she honor me? — the pus- and maggot-flesh of her tongue on my hand.

¹³⁶ Three pages in the collection have a single aphorism under two numbers (8/9, 11/12, 70/71).

8/9. A smelly bitch that has brought forth plenty of young, already rotting in places, but that to me in my childhood meant everything, who continue [sic]¹³⁷ to follow me faithfully everywhere, whom I am quite incapable of disciplining, but before whom I shrink back, step by step, shying away from her breath, and who will end up — unless I decide otherwise — forcing me into a corner that I can already see, there to decompose fully and utterly on me and with me, until finally — is it a distinction? — the pus- and worm-ravaged flesh of her tongue laps at my hand.

The innocent and common childhood memory of a boy and his dog returns as a nightmare, still familiar enough to be recognizable but also disgusting enough to repulse one, forcing one to “choose otherwise” or face a terrible end. Indeed, even classical notions of an afterlife are made even stranger in Kafka’s aphorisms:

4. Viele Schatten der Abgeschiedenen beschäftigen sich nur damit die Fluten des Totenflusses zu belecken, weil er von uns herkommt und noch den salzigen Geschmack unserer Meere hat. Vor Ekel sträubt sich dann der Fluß, nimmt eine rückläufige Strömung und schwemmt die Toten ins Leben zurück. Sie aber sind glücklich, singen Danklieder und streicheln den Empörten.

4. Many shadows of the departed busy themselves only with licking the waters of the river of death, for it comes from us and still has the salty taste of our oceans. In horror, the river recoils, reverses its flow, and sends the dead back into life. However, they are happy, sing songs of thanks, and stroke the upset waters.

4. Many of the shades of the departed busy themselves entirely with lapping at the waters of the Acheron, because it comes from us and still carries the salt tang of our seas. This causes the river to coil with revulsion, and even to reverse its course, and so to wash the dead back to life. They are perfectly happy, and sing choruses of gratitude, and caress the indignant river.

The Acheron, the river of death, comes to life here as it is repulsed by the dead, only to be calmed by the very same beings after returning them to life. Nothing escapes estrangement in Kafka’s *Zürcher Aphorismen*.

However, after the initial estrangement imparted to the reader by a first glance at the aphorisms, comes a second and perhaps third wave of alienation when the reader begins to look

¹³⁷ The subject-verb disagreement of “who” and “continue” is presumably a proofing error. The word translated as “who” from the German, “die,” is followed by a verb clearly conjugated in the singular, “folgt” [follows].

more closely at the language of the aphorism itself and how its very foundations begin to crumble under different interpretations, a fact to which Kafka alludes in aphorism 109:

109. „Daß es uns an Glauben fehle, kann man nicht sagen. Allein die einfache Tatsache unseres Lebens ist in ihrem Glaubenswert gar nicht auszuschöpfen.“
 „Hier wäre ein Glaubenswert? Man kann doch nicht nicht-leben.“
 „Eben in diesem ‚kann doch nicht‘ steckt die wahnsinnige Kraft des Glaubens; in dieser Verneinung bekommt sie Gestalt.“

109. “That we are lacking in faith cannot be said. The simple fact alone that we are alive is not to be exhausted of its worthiness of faith.”
 “You say that has worthiness of faith? But one cannot not-live though.”
 “Even in this ‘cannot’ there is the insane power of faith; in this denial it receives its form.”

109. “It cannot be claimed that we are lacking in belief. The mere fact of our being alive is an inexhaustible font of belief.”
 “The fact of our being alive a font of belief? But what else can we do but live?”
 “It’s in that ‘what else’ that the immense force of belief resides: it is the exclusion that gives its form.”

When read earnestly,¹³⁸ this aphorism appears to be a commentary on the impassable limitations of language and the stranglehold that language has on logic. The first speaker of the dialogue (the quotation marks are Kafka’s) states what he believes to be a universal truth: “that we are lacking in faith cannot be said” and that “the simple fact that we are alive is not to be exhausted of its worthiness of faith.” The second speaker rebukes the first speaker by attempting to undermine the first speaker’s logic that being alive proves the existence of faith, but to do this he must use a stilted construction to form a neologism, “cannot not-live,” [*kann doch nicht nicht-leben*] in order to convey his meaning. The second speaker’s neologism appears rather clever, but the first speaker then turns the second speaker’s neologism against him to make his point that the second speaker’s attempt to undermine the first speaker’s logic by manipulating language with this neologism is ultimately countered by language itself, for this emphatically used term

¹³⁸ Unfortunately, it cannot be helped that the three interpretations of aphorism 109 that follow here will be tedious and complicated to a certain degree.

“cannot” [*kann doch nicht*] of the phrase “cannot not-live” [*kann doch nicht nicht-leben*] in the second speaker’s statement is predicated on the faith in the ability of language to express prohibition and possibility: “Even in this ‘cannot’ there is the insane power of faith; in this denial it receives its form.” This final statement of the first speaker claims that attempting to deny the existence of faith with language is impossible, even when using neologisms, for the person who denies faith with language must have faith in the language that he or she uses to deny faith.

When read with irony, the contradictions of this aphorism undermine the notions set forth in the previous *prima facie* interpretation. The aphorism begins to collapse from the first sentence onward. Since the aphorism is clearly a dialogue, the first speaker says exactly what one cannot say — “that we are lacking in faith” — and then he says literally that one cannot say it. This initial contradiction immediately questions the findings of the first speaker discussed in the earnest reading, i.e., that language cannot deny faith. The first speaker may be using the phrase “one cannot say” idiomatically, but as one who criticizes another’s use of “cannot,” surely the first speaker is aware of the explicit meaning of his own statement, which brings into question the interpretability of the remainder of his statement. The dual meanings of the negated *sein* and *zu*, which are translated in the English as “is not to be” in the phrase “The simple fact alone that we are alive is not to be exhausted of its worthiness of faith” and which function in this particular combination analogously to their function in the German, require context to divine their specific meaning, and thus problematize the first speaker’s second sentence in which they are included: “The simple fact alone that we are alive is not to be exhausted of its worthiness of faith.” On the one hand with the negated *sein* and *zu* [“is not to be”] taken to express probability, the worthiness of belief in our living *cannot* be exhausted. On the other hand with the negated

sein and *zu* [“is not to be”] taken to express obligation, the worthiness *must not* be exhausted, and thus man must not question the worthiness of belief too deeply. Kafka could have easily cleared up this ambiguity by using a modal verb instead of *sein* and *zu*, but nonetheless the ambiguity remains.

Further ambiguity arises in the second speaker’s statement, “You say that has worthiness of faith,” when he facetiously invokes the subjunctive in the German with *wäre* [were] (translated here as “You say that”) and leaves the object of the worthiness of faith [*Glaubenswert*] of which he speaks vague: “You say that has worthiness of faith.” The reader cannot tell whether the second speaker’s *Glaubenswert* refers to the *Glaubenswert* in the first speaker’s sentence or to the entire utterance of the first speaker because the second speaker simply says “*Hier*” [Here] (translated here as “that” in the phrase “You say that has worthiness of faith”). The double negative of the second speaker’s next sentence (cannot not-live) [*kann doch nicht nicht-leben*] has the one meaning that one cannot be nonliving and still verify the first speaker’s point. It also has the other meaning that one cannot live at all, for it is unclear whether a double negative should reverse the negation or intensify the negation. The first speaker’s response (“Even in this ‘cannot’ there is the insane power of faith; in this denial it receives its form.”) to this doubly-negated neologism can be taken to mean that “the insane power of faith” is literally in the words or in language because mankind is bound to language. The same response can also have the meaning that the second speaker’s intent of the assertion itself, to deny the existence of faith, cannot defeat the first speaker’s point because of faith’s “insane power.” Either of these interpretations contradicts the first speaker’s initial point by relying on something other than “the simple fact that we are alive by itself” to prove that there is no lack in faith.

Combining the earnest and ironic to form a meta-reading, the contradictions of the aphorism undermine the notion of expressing oneself at all, for both speakers' arguments are predicated on and use language and its logic heavily, but the contradictory and ironic meanings of their arguments deny the ability of their own language to make an argument, yet they still speak their arguments and retain faith in language to speak truth. Thus, the meta-reading of aphorism 109 exposes the need for such multiple readings of all of Kafka's aphorisms and, in fact, of all utterances of language, for relying on language and its logic is shown in 109 to be susceptible to all kinds of deception, but as our only means of communication, we must work through the deception and retain faith in language to speak truth.

Aphorism 109 illustrates the limitations of language and logic based on language yet also illustrates man's inextinguishable faith in language to speak truth and the necessity of that faith. If 109 questions language's ability to speak truth, then one would presume to look elsewhere for truth. Aphorism 109 [b], the last aphorism in the collection,¹³⁹ explores this option and illustrates that man's faith in language and in language's ability to communicate truth to and from others is perhaps futile. Combined together, as they were in the fair copy of the collection, aphorisms 109 and 109 [b] communicate the Kafkan paradox of language in their discourse.

109. „Daß es uns an Glauben fehle, kann man nicht sagen. Allein die einfache Tatsache unseres Lebens ist in ihrem Glaubenswert gar nicht auszuschöpfen.“

„Hier wäre ein Glaubenswert? Man kann doch nicht nicht-leben.“

„Eben in diesem ,kann doch nicht' steckt die wahnsinnige Kraft des Glaubens; in dieser Verneinung bekommt sie Gestalt.“

[b] Es ist nicht notwendig, daß Du aus dem Haus gehst. Bleib bei Deinem Tisch und horche. Horche nicht einmal, warte nur. Warte nicht einmal, sei völlig still

¹³⁹ Aphorism 109 [b] is the last aphorism in the collection but not the last one in the chronological order of the writing of the eight aphorisms added to the collection in 1920. Whereas Kafka generally followed the chronological order of composition when collecting the first version of the collection from his notebooks, he did not do so with the eight aphorisms that he added in 1920.

und allein. Anbieten wird sich Dir die Welt zur Entlarvung, sie kann nicht anders, verückt wird sie sich vor Dir winden.

109. “That we are lacking in faith cannot be said. The simple fact alone that we are alive is not to be exhausted of its worthiness of faith.”

“You say that has worthiness of faith? But one cannot not-live though.”

“Even in this ‘cannot’ there is the insane power of faith; in this denial it receives its form.”

[b] It is not necessary that you go out of your house. Remain by your table and listen. Do not even listen, only wait. Do not even wait, be completely still and alone. The world will offer itself to you to be unmasked; it cannot do otherwise, in ecstasy it will writhe before you.

109. “It cannot be claimed that we are lacking in belief. The mere fact of our being alive is an inexhaustible font of belief.”

“The fact of our being alive a font of belief? But what else can we do but live?”

“It’s in that ‘what else’ that the immense force of belief resides: it is the exclusion that gives its form.”

[b] It isn’t necessary that you leave home. Sit at your desk and listen. Don’t even listen, just wait. Don’t wait, be still and alone. The whole world will offer itself to you to be unmasked, it can do no other, it will writhe before you in ecstasy.

109 [b] opens with the simple declaration that it is not necessary to leave one’s home. It follows with the commands to remain by one’s table and listen. To remain by one’s table is easy, but to listen out for something, to hearken (cognate of “*hörchen*”), is to expect it, to desire a sign of its coming or not coming. One cannot listen out for “the unmasking of the world,” for it is not such a form of communication. “The unmasking of the world” is an uncovering. The aphorism follows this chain of logic and demands that the reader only wait; however, waiting implies an expectation for an event that will end the waiting. One cannot wait for a sign communicating the world’s unmasking of itself. One can only “be completely still and alone”; then one can do what so many of Kafka’s other aphorisms say is impossible — to see the world unmasked. When one is completely still and alone, “[t]he world will offer itself to you to be unmasked.” However, the experience of unmasking the world is not something that can be

communicated via language and perhaps not at all, for one must be “completely quiet and alone,” and thus, befitting as the pervasive irony of this entire collection of aphorisms, language here proves its own impotence. The words of the aphorism and indeed the words of all the aphorisms of the collection, deprive the aphorism of its power, the ability of language to communicate truth, while simultaneously communicating that fact.

All four authors — Anonymous, Kierkegaard, Kafka, and de Certeau — ultimately promote dissimilar practices of discourse in search of similar goals. Anonymous promotes the recognition of the world in order to forget it through its effacement in discourse in exchange for knowing God; Kierkegaard promotes a heterogeneous system of discourses in discourse with each other in order to discover how and where faith lies outside of philosophy and ultimately exchange the discourse of philosophy for faith; Kafka promotes recognition of the world in order to alienate oneself from it via discourse in exchange for knowing the spiritual world; de Certeau promotes recognizing the discourse of orality in writing in order to remove the stranglehold that writing has on a contextualized orality in exchange for a pure orality that exists in its own milieu. None of the authors detail the precise procedure for accomplishing their goals; rather, they detail everything but the procedure and merely provide the means. Everything is apophasis; all ways are *via negativa*. The irony is, of course, that while Anonymous, Kierkegaard, and Kafka seek discourses that do, i.e., discourses that lead to their own impotence and ultimate absence in order to allow one to practice purely non-discursive acts, de Certeau seeks a non-discursive discourse for non-discursive acts — but all four promote similarly negative methods for achieving apparently opposite goals. However, perhaps the similarities and dissimilarities among the three are not all that ironic, for they all seek an *in-between*, a *remainder*, that is *different* to all that

surrounds it, and it is between the works of these four authors that the remainder can be found, but I cannot *speak for* them.

**Conclusion:
Divine Unions in Absolute Solitude**

Summary: Reaching a Sum

I. *via Negativa* — a Way to Negative Theologies

The Life of De Certeau

As indicated by the title of François Dosse's biography of Michel de Certeau, *Le marcheur blessé* (La Découverte, 2002) [The Injured Walker], de Certeau's life was that of a pilgrim's, both physically and mentally. Raised in the alpine region of France on large estate, educated at numerous institutions around France in the classics, philosophy, and theology, becoming a Jesuit and traveling in accordance with that order, gaining fame through his commentary on the events of May of 1968, practicing an extremely well-disciplined work ethic of prolific writing and teaching, all before succumbing to a cancer not diagnosed until its final stages just after achieving the most prestigious appointment of his career, de Certeau lived a life, transient yet full of purpose.

De Certeau's Everyday Life

The primary concern of De Certeau's *L'Invention du quotidien: tome I. Arts de faire* (Union Générale, 1980) [*The Practice of Everyday Life*, Trans. Steven Rendall (University of California Press, 1984)] is developing a method for making the subtle nuances of our everyday activities expressible. De Certeau believes that the evolution of western societies has been one

that has come to depend on writing, particularly scientific writing, to study and understand the world. That dependence has necessitated certain uniformities in our thinking, which de Certeau classifies as “strategies,” that do not allow for a complete understanding of the world. The details of the activities that escape our understanding, which de Certeau classifies as “tactics,” are the ways in which we adapt cultural “products,” either physical or mental, to our own individual “usages.” De Certeau prefers the term “user” when discussing members of a culture rather than the term “consumer” because the former emphasizes the member’s making use of a product while the latter emphasizes the member’s using it up in consuming it. This text of de Certeau’s informs the work of this dissertation because it skeptically critiques approaches to theory and practice and thereby provides its own approach *via negativa*, i.e., de Certeau’s work does little to positively assert its own methods but rather discounts improper methods for studying what has been previously ineffable.

De Certeau’s Life of mystics

In many ways, de Certeau’s *La Fable mystique: XVIe-XVIIe siècle, tome I* (Éditions Gallimard, 1982) [*The Mystic Fable: Volume One — The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Trans. Michael B. Smith (University of Chicago Press, 1992)], is a specific application of the more general work done in *L’Invention du quotidien*. This study focuses on mysticism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the problems inherent in the conceptualizations of mysticism in that period. De Certeau’s example of the term *la mystique* (translated as “mystics”) illustrates his point well. At the beginning of the historical period with which de Certeau is concerned, the term was primarily used as an adjective to denote the special way in which mystics thought, spoke, wrote, or even lived. As the term evolved, it became a noun that denoted

mysticism in general; however, rather than functioning as a tool to describe mysticism, it became a heading under which the diverse practices of mysticism were collected, and, by nature of its eccentrics and esotericism, true mysticism could not be denoted in such a way and virtually disappeared to the eyes of those who were seeking to study it as a definite phenomenon. In the same manner of *L’Invention du quotidien*, *La Fable mystique* informs the work of this dissertation through its own negative approach, though its work is much more specific. This negative theme is further related to this dissertation in that de Certeau’s *La Fable mystique* primarily examines the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and considers the periods before and after that time as only containing traces of what was happening in and to mysticism during those two centuries, and it is exactly in these periods outside of those two centuries that this dissertation seeks those traces.

II. *Tracing De Certeau’s Remainder*

Several Negative Theologies

A negative theology is defined here as a way of coming to know who God is by first knowing and then rejecting what he is not. Three authors are discussed as having developed negative theologies: the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Book of Privy Counsel* (hereafter referred to as “Anonymous”), Søren Kierkegaard, and Franz Kafka.

Anonymous: A Negative Identity

Anonymous was most likely a fourteenth-century monk who lived in the East Midlands of England. The primary concern of Anonymous’s work is instructing his or her reader in the

practice of contemplation. Contemplation is attempting to conceive of God and must be practiced by the forgetting and denying the world.

Pseudonymous: Negating Identity

Søren Kierkegaard was a nineteenth-century Danish philosopher who wrote many works under pseudonyms. The two pseudonymous works under discussion in this dissertation, *Fear and Trembling: A Dialectical Lyric* [*Frygt og Bæven: Dialektisk Lyrik* (1843)] and *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Edification and Awakening* [*Sygdommen til Døden: En christelig psykologisk Udvikling til Opvækkelse* (1849)], concern developing a unique relationship with God by relinquishing all that is dear to one and by shaping the self based purely on an individual, absolute relationship with God.

Posthumous: A Remainder

Franz Kafka was a twentieth-century Czech author of primarily fiction. Kafka did compose a posthumously published collection of aphorisms, often referred to as *The Zürau Aphorisms*. This collection of just over a hundred aphorisms provide its reader with a method for escaping the physical world and discovering the spiritual world by totally alienating oneself from the physical world.

III. *The Je ne Sais quoi of Savoir Faire — A Know-How for Knowing God*

Knowing by Being Unknown

This section of this dissertation explores de Certeau's concept of *la perruque* [the peruke] from *L'Invention du quotidien*, which is a French idiom for conducting personal business on company time and/or with company materials. De Certeau uses this term as trope for the ways in which individual "users" make use of cultural "products" in a manner that is discernible to other "users." Similarly in *La Fable mystique*, de Certeau identifies examples of individuals in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who would have "worn the peruke" had they not been so oppressed by the Church and their governments.

Knowing by unknowing

Anonymous, writing in a time not quite as oppressive as the latter periods, still must adopt methods to avoid producing "heresy" and while still using common means of communication that must ultimately efface themselves along with the world. He or she achieves this goal by writing in the vernacular, Middle English, and by employing particular linguistic tactics that first "expand" to encompass broad areas of knowledge and then "constrict" to bring the reader to a particular plain of knowing.

Hegel Nor the Church Know

Kierkegaard had to contend with oppressive systems as well in his own time, the Church and Hegelianism. Incorporating the language and logic of the Church and of Hegel, Kierkegaard develops tactics for slowly erasing language and its logic as a reader progresses through his text and his thought by dizzying the reader with repetitive and paradoxical usages of language and concepts.

The Thinker Cannot Know

Kafka, by choosing the mode of the aphorism, was working within and against a genre with a long history, especially in the German tradition. The chief goal of the Kafkan aphorism is to communicate thoughts without communicating a cohesive rational system of thinking creating those thoughts, and the aphorism proves to be a mode of expression that is well-suited to such communication because of its fragmentary nature and its lack of privileging any one thought over another.

IV. Discourses that Do — Practice...Practice...Practice

Exorcizing Language: Paronomasias

In the tenth and eleventh chapters of *L’Invention du quotidien*, de Certeau goes in search of a lost orality that has been consumed by writing in the last few centuries in Western cultures. The freedoms of expression in orality cannot be rendered in writing and thus have been restricted when orality is transcribed. In the fourth chapter of *La Fable mystique*, de Certeau gives some indications of how mystic speech functions on its own and in writing by its particular methods for referencing using “transparent” signs, which is all too often in turn completely made opaque in studies of mystic speech.

Paramnesias: The Forgotten Word, The Forgetting World

Anonymous instructs his or her reader to take advantage of the power of orality and discourse by concentrating on a particular word, severing all connections that word has with

meaning, and “voicing” that word against thought in order ultimately to render the mind thoughtless.

Parodies: Para-meta-pseudo-non-philosopher

Kierkegaard, whether considered a philosopher or a thinker standing in relation to philosophy, works within, without, and with philosophy, using pseudonymous works and works under his own name, in order to create a vast system of heterogeneous discourse among his works that ultimately proves that faith is not a concept that can be properly conceived using philosophy.

Paradoxes: Alienation to Reveal a World

Kafka creates a system of discourse of his own, though it is made heterogeneous by the fragmentary nature of the aphorism and the seeming randomness of his topics. This system of discourse is used by his reader to reveal the utter strangeness of the world and thereby alienate him or herself from it. Once initially alienated, the reader returns to the collection of aphorisms with a heightened sense of awareness of the strange brought on by the initial alienation and is, with that sense, able to discover deeper levels of strangeness within the aphorisms that provide even further abilities to escape the physical world via alienation.

A sum has been reached here; now let us reach a conclusion.

Croire/faire croire: Belief = Believing

As a first approximation, I define ‘belief’ [‘*croyance*’] not as the object of believing (a dogma, a program, etc.) but as the subject’s investment in a proposition, the *act* of saying it and considering it true [*l’investissement des sujets*]

dans une proposition, l'acte de l'énoncer en la tenant pour vraie]¹⁴⁰ — in other words, a 'modality' [*modalité*] of the assertion and not its content. The capacity for believing seems to be receding everywhere in the field of politics. That capacity once supported the functioning of 'authority' [*autorité*]. Since Hobbes [1588-1679], political philosophy, especially in the English tradition, has considered this articulation as fundamental. Through this link, politics made its relationship of difference and continuity with religion explicit. But the will to 'make people believe' (*faire-croire*) that gives life to institutions, provided in both cases a counterpart for a search for love and/or identity.¹⁴¹

(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 178)

The thirteenth chapter of de Certeau's *L'Invention du quotidien*, "*Croire/faire croire*"

[*"Believing and Making People Believe"*]¹⁴² in the fifth and final part of his book, "*Manières de croire*" [*"Ways of Believing"*], explores the ways people believe and how belief is manipulated by institutions. De Certeau begins by stating that the political and religious beliefs contemporary with the writing of his book (1980) are "past beliefs that no longer organize practices" (de Certeau 177). People continue to belong to various institutions that are organized by certain creeds but no longer truly participate in them: "One is a socialist because one *used to be* one, no longer going to demonstrations, attending meetings, sending in one's dues, in short, without paying" (de Certeau 177). Every one of the institutions persists by not depending on its members to necessarily continue their beliefs but rather by depending on its members not being attracted to other institutions. As de Certeau more aptly puts it, "[It is] not about the energy of convictions, but their inertia: 'If it is false that you believe in something else, then it must be

¹⁴⁰ Though perhaps negligible, the *and* in the phrase "the *act* of saying it and considering it true" [*l'acte de l'énoncer en la tenant pour vraie*] might be better translated as "while" to render it "the *act* of saying it while considering it true." The latter translation might stress better the contemporaneity of "saying" and "considering" and also the subordination of "considering" to "saying." The entire passage above can be found in the French on page 300 of de Certeau's *L'Invention du quotidien: tome I. Arts de faire* (Paris: Union Générale) 1980.

¹⁴¹ De Certeau directs his readers to works by W. V. Quine, Jaako Hintikka, Rodney Needham, Ernest Gellner, John M. Vickers, R. S. Peters, Peter Winch, and Pierre Legendre in footnotes (2-5) throughout this paragraph.

¹⁴² The translator (Steven Rendall) of *L'Invention du quotidien* translates the title of this chapter as "Believing and Making People Believe." Though the inclusion of "people" is only implied in the French, Rendall had little choice because the English idiom "to make-believe" obviously would not do.

true that you are still on our side” (de Certeau 177). This erosion of beliefs forces de Certeau to define “belief” the way that he does because what one believes no longer matters but rather only the energy an individual devotes to what he or she believes in and the proclamation of that belief: “the subject’s investment in a proposition, the *act* of saying it and considering it true” (de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 178) [*l’investissement des sujets dans une proposition, l’acte de l’énoncer en la tenant pour vraie*] (de Certeau, *L’Invention du quotidien*, 300)].

According to de Certeau, the process that led to such a state of believing happened thus:

For a long time people assumed that the reserves of belief were limitless [*on a supposé indéfinies les réserves de croyance*]. All one had to do was to create islands of rationality in the ocean of credulity, isolate and secure the fragile conquests made by critical thinking. The rest, considered inexhaustible,¹⁴³ was supposed to be transportable toward other objects and other ends, just as waterfalls are harnessed by hydroelectric plants. People tried to ‘capture’ [*capter*] this force by moving it from one place to another: from the so-called pagan societies they led it toward the Christianity it was supposed to support; later it was diverted from the Churches in the direction of political monarchy; and later still from a traditional religiousness to the institutions of the Republic, the national organization of schools and its educational ideology, or various forms of socialism.¹⁴⁴ These ‘conversions’ [*conversions*] consisted in capturing the energy of belief by moving it about. What was not transportable, or not yet transported, into the new areas of progress appeared as ‘superstition’ [*superstition*]; what could be used by the reigning order was accorded the status of a ‘conviction’ [*conviction*]. The fund was so rich that in exploiting it people forgot the necessity of analyzing it. Campaigns and crusades consisted in conveying and investing energy of believing in good places and on good objects (to be believed).

(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 178-179)

Belief was considered a dynamo in perpetual motion, which could produce all the necessary energy to power these institutions and their apparatuses simply by converting its output to whatever polarity, current, or frequency was required. However, as we have been discovering

¹⁴³ This echoes Kafka’s aphorism 109: “That we are lacking in faith cannot be said. The simple fact alone that we are alive is not to be exhausted of its worthiness of faith. . . .” The German word translated as “faith” is *Glauben*, which can also mean “belief.”

¹⁴⁴ Though de Certeau does not qualify his statement as such, one must assume that he is referring most directly to France in the twentieth century with the latter part of this process (institutions of the Republic, the national organization of schools and its educational ideology, or various forms of socialism).

about the nature of our own environment, energy is not limitless, nor is it produced without waste:

Little by little belief became polluted, like the air and the water. The motive energy [*Cette énergie motrice*], always resistant but manipulable [*traitable*], finally begins to run out. People notice at the same time that no one knows what it is. . . . Today, it is no longer enough to manipulate [*manipuler*], transport, and refine belief; its composition must be analyzed because people want to produce it artificially; commercial and political marketing studies are still making partial efforts in this direction. There are now too many things to believe and not enough credibility to go around [*Il y a désormais trop d'objets à croire et pas assez de crédibilité*].

(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 179)

But while the amount of available credibility (and in our own current time the amount of available *credit*) has and is dwindling, the larger, higher, and more established institutions have and continue to develop procedures to remain “authorities,” to do away with waste that is toxic (assets), to continue being (too) big (to fail), though these procedures are becoming only momentary stays against the inevitable:

An inversion is produced. The old powers cleverly managed their ‘authority’ [*autorité*] and thus compensated for their inadequacy of their technical or administrative apparatus: they were systems of clienteles, allegiances, ‘legitimacies’ [*légitimités*], etc. They sought, however, to make themselves more independent of the fluctuations [*jeux*] of these fidelities through rationalization, the control and organization of space. As the result of this labor, the powers in our developed societies have at their disposal rather subtle and closely-knit procedures for the control [*surveiller*] of all social networks: these are the administrative and ‘panoptic’ systems [*systèmes administratifs et ‘panoptiques’*]¹⁴⁵ of the police, the schools, health services, security, etc. But they are slowly losing all credibility. They have more power and less authority [*Ils disposent de plus de forces et de moins d'autorité*].

(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 179)

¹⁴⁵De Certeau directs his readers to follow his allusion with the term *panoptiques* [panoptic], which has become common in the post-structuralist vocabulary, to Michel Foucault’s *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la Prison* (Gallimard, 1975) [*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (Pantheon, 1977)]. Though unapparent in translation, de Certeau also alludes to Foucault’s work in the phrase that precedes the one above: “closely-knit procedures for the control [*surveiller*] of all social networks.” The word translated as “control” is *surveiller*, which is not only in the title of Foucault’s book but also a major concept in that work.

While the old powers have developed elaborate means of observation and control, the means have come to be only respected or feared by those they control rather than *believed in*. They are obeyed not because they are inherently righteous or because they stand for a greater good but rather because those they control lack the energy to foster faith in any alternative. But those in charge of the design and implementation of these means of observation and control do not worry about the decrease in believe-abilities; they compensate for the depleted reserves of belief by increasing the depth and scope of their means of control:

Technicians are often not concerned with this problem, since they are preoccupied with extending and making more complex the mechanisms for maintenance and control. An illusory confidence [*Trompeuse assurance*]. The sophistication of the discipline does not compensate for the fact that subjects no longer invest and commit themselves in believing. In businesses, the demobilization of workers is growing faster than the surveillance network of which it is the target, pretext, and effect. Wasting of products, diversion of time, ‘*la perruque*,’¹⁴⁶ turn-over or inactivity of employees, etc. undermine from within a system which . . . tends to become a form of imprisonment in order to prevent any sort of escape. In administrations, offices, and even in political and religious groups a cancerous growth of the apparatus is the consequence of the evaporation of convictions, and this cancer becomes in turn the cause of a new evaporation of believing. Looking out for one’s own interests is no substitute for belief [*L’intérêt ne remplace pas la croyance*].

(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 179-180)

These “technicians” keep this repetitive cycle in motion, expanding the apparatuses of observation and control, an expansion necessitated by diminishing belief, yet an expansion that saps belief in the process. When a particular reservoir of belief is completely drained, belief is then synthesized:

In order to bring back some of these beliefs that are retreating and disappearing, businesses have begun to fabricate their own simulacra of credibility. Shell oil produces the Credo of ‘values’ that ‘inspire’ its top administrators and that its managers and employees adopt as well. The same sort of thing is found in

¹⁴⁶ “*La perruque*” [the peruke] is a French idiom for conducting personal business on company time and/or with company materials. I discuss this concept at length in the first section of the second chapter of this dissertation.

countless other businesses, even if they are slow in getting in motion and still count on the fictive capital of an earlier family, house, or regional 'spirit.'
(de Certeau 180)

One need look no further for contemporary examples of this kind of "spirit"-based fabrication of credibility and its self-perpetuation and self-congratulation than the ubiquitous Walmart, a title that combines a family (Walton) with an innocuous, generic business (-mart) to form one of the largest conglomerates, in terms of incorporation and goods and services offered, with Kafkaesque apparatuses of organization and departmentalization (emphasis is my own):

Stephen Quinn, *chief marketing officer* for Walmart, said, "Receiving this *award* [American Advertising Federation's Prestigious Honor of Excellence in Advertising (2009)] and having this *recognition* for our work is *testament* to the dedication of all our associates at Walmart. *Sam Walton* [1918-1992, founder of Walmart] *said* it best with, 'If we work together, we'll lower the cost of living for everyone...we'll *give the world an opportunity to see* what it's like to save and have a better life.' It's the *spirit* behind our *campaign* and why we *believe* it has been so well received by our customers and by our associates."
(*American Advertising Federation*, [<http://www.aaf.org>])

Though institutions are exploring ways to manufacture belief, it will have an even shorter shelf life than the original. According to de Certeau, the only type of belief that has any chance of lasting longer is the vintage kind from the "traditional sources," politics and religion.

Where is the material to be found which can be used to inject credibility into these mechanisms?¹⁴⁷ There are two traditional sources, the one political, and the other religious: in the first, the mobility of ebbing away of conviction among militants is compensated for by an overdevelopment of administrative institutions and managerial staff; in the second, on the contrary, institutions that are disintegrating or closing in on themselves allow the beliefs that they long promoted, maintained, and controlled be scattered in every direction.
(de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 180)

De Certeau goes on to discuss the particulars of what has and is happening to belief in politics and religion, but, as always, he does not outline a solution; he only details the problem in all its intricacies and their relations. Indeed, there may be no solution, but it is apparent that the

¹⁴⁷ We see this notion of "injecting credibility" (and capital) in T.A.R.P. (the Troubled Asset Relief Fund of 2008).

problem originates in organization, in grouping, in creating institutions, in forming collectives. Such gatherings require vast sums of energy for believing and are not sustainable, which only causes the small reserves of belief that remain after their failings and bankruptcies to be moved to yet another gathering. But could not this problem of belief be solved if, rather than reinvesting belief in new gatherings, belief were divested from any gathering? Anonymous, Kierkegaard, and Kafka perhaps offer a solution to the problem of belief, though it comes at a weighty price: To achieve the most powerful and inexhaustible of beliefs, i.e., pure faith in knowing God as God is, one must divest all energy of belief from the world and invest it in God, and one must abandon any sort of gathering and withdraw into a solitude that is absolute.

A Soule is Onyd with God: Soul<1>God

Then [Jesus] said to them all: ‘if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and the holy angels. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.

(Luke 9:23-27)

[Paul said:] Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. . . . Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence — continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

(Philippians 2:5-7, 12-13)

Anonymous references both the biblical passages above in the section of *The Book of Privy Counsel* in which he instructs his reader to “[f]orget yourself entirely *in exchange for* a complete awareness of God’s being” (*The Cloud of Unknowing with the Book of Privy Counsel*, 201):

In contemplation you learn to abandon and forget your own self, after the teaching of Christ in the Gospel, who said: ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.’ It’s as if he said this to help you understand contemplation better: ‘Come humbly after me — not with me but after me — following me to the joy of eternity and the summit of perfection.’ Christ went before us, in human form, and we follow after him, in grace.

(*The Cloud of Unknowing with the Book of Privy Counsel*, 200)

Anonymous is stressing to his reader here in the final stages of contemplation, after the world

has been forgotten, that even the self must be surrendered — this is *absolute* solitude:

I want to clarify an earlier point here. I know that I said you must forget all things *except* the blind awareness of your naked being; however, what I really meant from the very beginning was something else, something beyond that, something we’ve been working toward together all along, and this is it. Forget yourself entirely *in exchange for* a complete awareness of God’s being [*pou schuldest forgete þe felyng of þe beyng of þi-self as for þe felyng of beyng of God*].¹⁴⁸ Because of your inexperience, I thought it would be premature of me to expect you — all at once — to suddenly soar up to a spiritual awareness of God’s being, so I’ve been leading you there by degrees. You’ve been climbing up a step at a time. The first step was my advising you to gnaw [*gnawe*] on the simple blind awareness of your own being for a time, until your perseverance in this initial interior exercise gave you a familiarity with contemplative work, preparing you to reach the highness of God.

Your goal and your desire should always be to feel God in this work. Although I told you at first to cover and clothe [*lappe & clope*] your awareness of God in the awareness of yourself, I did this because of your inexperience in spiritual unawareness. However, when through persistence in this exercise, you’ve gained experience and wisdom, you’ll undress yourself — strip — completely take off your self-awareness, to be clothed with the grace-filled awareness of God himself [*spoyle & vtterly vnclope þi-self of al maner of felyng of þi-self, þat þou be able to be clopid wip þe gracyous felyng of God self*].

(*The Cloud of Unknowing with the Book of Privy Counsel*, 201-202)

In order to gain “awareness of God’s being,” the contemplator must first invest, i.e. “clothe,”¹⁴⁹

the awareness of God in the awareness of the self [*“lappe & clope þe felyng of þi God in þe*

¹⁴⁸ The *g* in “*forgete*” is actually a yogh in the work cited, Phyllis Hodgson’s *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling* (Oxford, 1944), 155-156. The letter yogh could not be rendered in the Times New Roman font used for this dissertation but appears in the Tahoma font as “3.” The letter was used in Middle English to denote velar and palatal fricatives and was eventually omitted or replaced by *g*, *gh*, or *y* in most cases in Modern English.

¹⁴⁹ *Invest* comes from the Latin *investire* “to clothe.”

felyng of þi-self” (Hodgson, *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling*, 156)].

Once total awareness of the self has been achieved, even the self must then be divested, i.e.

“unclothed”¹⁵⁰ [“*vncloþe þi-self of al maner of felyng of þi-self*” (Hodgson, *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling*, 156)], in order to be invested and clothed in the awareness of God [“*þat þou be able to be cloþid wiþ þe gracyous felyng of God self*” (Hodgson, *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling*, 156)]. With this final act of the good work of contemplation, two — God and the divested person — become one in a solitude that is absolute.¹⁵¹

Enten Paradox, eller : |relation to absolute|

Enten er der da et Paradox til, at den Enkelte som den Enkelte staaer i et absolut Forhold til det Absolute, eller Abraham er tabt.

(Kierkegaard, *Frygt og Bæven*, 109)

Thus, either there is a paradox, that the single individual as the single individual stands in an absolute relation the absolute, or Abraham is lost.

(Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 120)

i at forholde sig til sig selv og i at ville være sig selv grunder Selvet gjennemsigtigt i den Magt, som satte det. Hvilken Formel igjen, hvorom oftere er mindet, er Definitionen paa Tro.

(Kierkegaard, *Sygdommen til Døden*, 279)

in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it. This formula in turn, as has been frequently pointed out, is the definition of faith.

(Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 131)

With these closing statements of his two texts, Kierkegaard leaves us another paradox, another

“either/or” that is both and neither: “the single individual as the single individual stands in an

¹⁵⁰ *Divest* comes from the Medieval Latin *divestire*, from Latin *dis-* “apart” and *vestire* “to clothe.”

¹⁵¹ *Absolute* ultimately derives from the Latin *absolvere* “to set free.”

absolute relation the absolute” and/or/nor “in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it.” Both these statements and the texts to which they belong have as their main concern the understanding of pure faith and therewith knowledge of God. Both risk essentially the same: in the former, what is stated is true or Abraham, as the faithful, is lost, and thus we do not know what faith is; in the latter, what is stated is true, or the very definition of faith is lost. In the former, the *individual stands in* [*den Enkelte staaer i*]; in the latter, the *self rests in* [*grunder Selvet . . . i*]. The former *depends* on paradox (“either there is a paradox, . . . or”); the latter *is* paradox (“in relating itself to itself. . . the self rests transparently in the power that established it”). The former requires a *removal* of an alternative, an other, the “or,” to be absolute; the latter requires a *withdrawal* into an absolute self. Like Weierstrass’s¹⁵² two lines in mathematics that denote an absolute value, “| |,” there exists a space in between these two works, in between Kierkegaard and his “other” authors that cannot be de-fined, though it must be *in*-vested; it both rests and stands in the *in*-finite of a solitary absolute.

+/-27.

27. *Das Negative zu tun, ist uns noch auferlegt, das Positive ist uns schon gegeben.*

27. Doing the negative is still to be done by us; the positive is already given to us.

We possess the positive — the world given to us — we need only negate it. Only through the negation of the positive can the absolute be reached. The physical world must be effaced by being divested of belief, by becoming null. Behind that zero lies the vested spiritual, waiting. . . .

¹⁵² Karl Theodor Willhelm Weierstrass (1815-1897) invented the denotation of absolute value in 1876 (Nicholas J. Higham, *Handbook of Writing for the Mathematical Sciences*. Philadelphia: Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics, 1998, 25).

Est mystique celui ou celle qui ne peut s'arrêter de marcher et qui, avec la certitude de ce qui lui manque, sait de chaque lieu et de chaque objet que ce n'est pas ça, qu'on ne peut résider ici ni se contenter de cela.

(de Certeau, *La Fable mystique*, 411)

He or she is a mystic who cannot stop walking and who, with the certainty of that which he or she lacks, knows about every place and about every object that it is *not that*, that one cannot remain *here* nor be content with *that*.

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