

Redell Olsen

the matter of cloven- poetics: or, even the title against itself

“It is easy to call the Baroque inexistent; it suffices not to propose its concept” (Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold*).

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Criticism: a collared stag and a stag collared. As though the need to enclose, tame, capture that which had for so many millennia been the most esteemed object of the chase extended not only to deer parks.

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If this were only a call to a poetics of the baroque then its matter, its doors and windows would perhaps only open or even close from the outside and onto the outside. We might choose to investigate the interior of this stately folded home through a recognition of how poetry and criticism co-exist as “pleats of matter in conditions of exteriority”.¹ In other words, how we might take down

the jacquard curtains and, with no small amount of trouble, wash them and hang them out to dry on the lawn. But whether such a baroque criticism or criticism as baroque that *unfolds* with every tramp of the 'T' through a common recognition of the façade could make any transformation of that historical ha-ha, the division between poetry and criticism, is uncertain.² This baroque façade is riddled with holes that might serve as viewpoints inside or out into the park towards an extension of the baroque rather than a settling on its existing seductions of surface and surfeit tensions.

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Deep in the forest here, a red deer called Ahornia still refuses to cross the old Iron Curtain.³

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If the *Trompe l'Oeil* of the façade suddenly gave way and you found yourself inside some baroque poetic edifice erected in homage to criticism, or even a University lecture hall, you might look up through a transformational decor of painted skies not meant to have any structural use but nevertheless appearing with the promise of other dimensions, in the form of advertisements for holidays abroad or an MBA by long-distance learning.

You could watch the space expand around you, its walls individualised by the columns into something like a promenading throng of dubious classification systems concerning poetry, criticism, theory.

¹ Deleuze, Gilles. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. Trans. Tom Conley. London: Continuum, 2006. p. 40.

² A ha-ha "is a boundary to a garden, pleasure-ground, or park, of such a kind as not to interrupt the view from within, and not to be seen till closely approached; consisting of a trench, the inner side of which is perpendicular and faced with stone, the outer sloping and turfed; a sunk fence" OED. Second edition, 1989; online version December 2011. <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/83261>>; accessed 05 February 2012.

³ Rohwedder, Cecilie. "Deep in the Forest, Bambi remains the Cold War's Last Stand." *TheWallStreet Journal* 5th November 2009. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125729481234926717.html>

Taken altogether and seen from underneath the whole thing causes a mild vertigo—that baroque frisson—or at least might make you think that you were seeing things, as sizes and distances melt and change before your eyes, jutting ledges lead straight on to others you know to be far above or break off and lead nowhere. Say that it was not a stately home or a lecture hall at all but a painted cave in which you found yourself. The effect conveyed on the walls of the cave was of a group of stags, heads up, being driven past an observer. You might be forgiven for thinking that you were looking at an analogy for a common relationship between poetry and criticism.

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In contradistinction to a building this then perhaps an urban square, porous to entry from many different sides including the pixelations of a vexed pastoral landscape. The village leaking green.

Or, a net of radios cast over a space with the sounds phoned into each city passed through its self-mixer and starting to loop. With each cross-country pass, each sound makes another layer, overlapping itself at different pitches until it gradually dies away or “It was quite a beautiful Sunday afternoon.”⁴

So much decoration at risk of making the inside explode figures widely as a cult object yet objects to being called one as a badge of honour. Gold. Grids suspend as matter is, d’Or and doo-da informe us: “In this way I could transform the character of this fat from a chaotic and unsettled state to a very solid condition of form.”⁵

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⁴Max Neuhaus. “The Broadcast Works: Radio Net” Max Neuhaus.info <<http://www.max-neuhaus.info/soundworks/>>. (PDF download, p.13).

⁵Joseph Beuys quoted by Rosalind Krauss in “Olympia”, *Formless: a user’s guide*. Eds. Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss. New York: Zone Books, 1997. p. 147.

Not a baroque folly or pre-historic cave then. No golden grid. Out into the park.

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Two shapes held together without always touching: a trail of prints left in the snow as a deer makes its way across a space that was once bounded.

At the height of the Cold War, a high electric fence, barbed wire and machine-gun-carrying guards cut off Eastern Europe from the Western world. The barriers severed the herds of deer on the two sides. The group enforces the phantom divisions between genres through what they remember to be true.

Ahornia grazes on the Western side but stops when she nears the border, her world ending where the Free World once did.

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To propose a conceptual problem for a cloven-poetics that is not done with matter. What matters is how the form up against the wire of a self-enclosed system baulks. And what then? This is a document that is also a proposal for what might have been and could be again: a cloven-poetics.

In a cloven-poetics, criticism and poetry might refuse such a distinction preferring to be joined and split in cleaving hyphenation.

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The operations of a cloven-poetics are in slippage. Not content with being content merely. The creases of poetry and criticism that matter brings to life. A matter of words made live in a shopped in cavity that might be negotiated while dangling from the ceiling in a full-body harness with pencil and paper handy: drawing restraint and reaching up to and including her limits for example.⁶

Or, if that is too much information, the form of a cloven-poetics

here is a tearing down of tissue through repetitive stress in order to enlarge specific parts of the syntax and grammar as needed. This need not necessarily be an outcome in the material sense, but could appear conceptually as a mode that records indices of energy expended, or as representational mark-ups in woods; all that is dear in my sights.

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Deep in the woods there are signs that cross-border traffic may pick up. “Our data showed that the animals behaved very traditionally,” says Mr. Sustr. “The former border was in the minds of the animals. But some of the young animals are searching for new territory. They are more and more deleting the border behaviour that was there before.”

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A cloven-poetics recognises itself as something at the limit, turns away and goes on. An acknowledgement which leads to a transformation of sorts that is always on the move and toward a redrawing.

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“The results of asking half a million people to do anything, even something as simple as whistling, of course will be diverse. Some will do it; others won’t. Those who do will choose how or what to whistle.”⁷

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In 2002, he started fitting yellow collars on deer on his side of the German-Czech border, in part to study how migration patterns had changed with the fence gone. The collars have small GPS receivers and radio units that send messages about the wearer’s location.

⁶For related performances see Carolee Schneeman, *Up To and Including her Limits* (1973-76) and Matthew Barney, *Drawing Restraint 2* (1988).

⁷Max Neuhaus. “The Broadcast Works: Radio Net” <<http://www.kunstradio.at/ZEITGLEICH/CATALOG/ENGLISH/neuhaus2b-e.html>>

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The critical matter of a cloven-poetics might not necessarily propose its conceptual other as elsewhere. That might not mean that it is without substance, or that a cloven-poetics is without matter. Or that criticism does not.

Out from and over the ha-ha.

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A cloven-poetics might also refuse to stand alongside an object, to refuse what it is supposed to call “its”.

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Images of deer weeping over re-runs of Bambi-Goes-to-War is trending. Its subjects as zones in performance at market rates.

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A cloven-poetics might stand against itself from within a space. A space in which appropriation occurs and then is bricked up and thrown open, or created out of sequence with at least some modes of possible entry left open to swarm with elements.

That faun cannot come out of the thicket without a struggle.

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You might take a pin to measure the kinships between the various marks made on a map of matter and realise that it is the pin that needs recoding. A cloven-poetics might make this good as goo.

A cloven-poetics might stand against itself from within.

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What the matter is with criticism might be the same question as what the matter is for poetry, even if it is all nostalgic for natural landed scrapes with real porcelain cows, even edible sheep, or interactive elements.

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A cloven-poetics strives to surpass threshold after threshold of corporeal limitation or just limits the corporeal to a minimum threshold. Thrash metal hold.

It is easy to call a cloven-poetics inexistent but that would be to miss the substance of poetry which is always a critical matter.

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Cut to the chase. In effect this is of a deer who refuses to cross the lyric fence.

“The wall in the head is still there.”

The once-deadly border area is alive with songbirds nesting in crumbling watchtowers, foxes hiding in weedy fortifications and animals not seen here for years, such as elk and lynx.

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To come to understand a cloven-poetics as a vast field of shared consciousness which encompasses the landscape as setting, as well as all the poetic and critical roles in the refusal of the drama of stalking, killing and consuming the text. To refuse the Shamanic at the same time as to recognise that this state of super-consciousness is so delicate and so precarious that when talking of a cloven-poetics, especially in the forest, one can not refer to criticism by its ordinary name. Instead a cloven-poetics, such an indirect name links to the aversion from any moment of sudden, violent action. A turning away from, after a long wait, the swift and decisive in-

stant when an arrow or bullet kills. Instead a cloven poetics, a criticism transformed so that it seems almost against itself, up to and including its own limits: an arcade pastoral of non-hierarchical relationships in nomadic reformation.

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A cloven-poetics is one then that wears its furs differently from the original owner and is even sometimes mistaken for this other from without. The skin from the legs is re-used to form leggings for the cloven-poetics and the fur hood carries reindeer ears or antlers that signal other possibilities and points of connection borrowed from any statement made for the border.

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