The question is whether you can make words mean so many different things

Intention in Retrospect

Talent borrows, genius steals. This maxim, which has been attributed to Wilde, Picasso, Stravinsky, T.S. Eliot, Sir Thomas Beecham, Bob Dylan, and Morrissey, appears in the preceding list of words and quotations in connection with 'epigone' meaning '*a second-rate imitator or follower, especially of an artist or philosopher.*' Eliot's place in the above list is not entirely accurate, his "*Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal*" conveys the same meaning as that infamous aphorism, but the sentiment has been rewritten providing a more definite and distinct adumbration of the relationship between writers and their predecessors. This habit of youthful imitation described by Robert Louis Stevenson also illustrates the word 'sedulous,' '*diligent in application or attention; persevering; assiduous*.'

> **"Whenever I read a book or a passage that particularly pleased me, in which a thing was said or an effect rendered with propriety, in which there was either some conspicuous force or some happy distinction in the style, I must sit down at once and set myself to ape that quality. I was unsuccessful, and I knew it; and tried again, and was again unsuccessful and always unsuccessful; but at least in these vain bouts, I got some practice in rhythm, in harmony, in construction and the co-ordination of parts. I have thus played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth, to Sir Thomas Browne, to Defoe, to Hawthorne, to Montaigne, to Baudelaire and to Obermann."**[i]

The practice highlighted by Eliot and described by Stevenson is usually regarded as benign, a sin committed only in adulation, but literary theft, which Eliot ascribes to the mature writer who should know better, is a more contentious subject. My list of favourite words, phrases, and sentences, which is a list of materials, includes twenty-three quotations; a number of them can be found in the stories, *Aporia* and *Rondo*, which begin and end this book. Presented as a list, each quotation acknowledges the original author, but in no instance do I provide citations for quotations when I use them in fiction.

In the essay '*What is an Author?*' Foucault began to question what it means to attribute an author in a text. The author-function he describes has four main characteristics:

> *"[…] the 'author-function' is tied to the legal and institutional systems that circumscribe, determine, and articulate the realm of discourses; it does not operate in a uniform manner in all discourse, at all times, and in any given culture; it is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a text to its creator, but through a series of precise and complex procedures; it does not refer, purely and simply, to an actual individual insofar as it simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions that individuals of any class may occupy."*[ii]

Foucault's conception of the author-function is, of course, related to his understanding of discourse and power; the author as a function of discourse has a direct relationship to authority. In certain disciplines, and the types of texts that they produce, the affinity of author and authority is in the service of knowledge, but in others it is an arbitrary relationship that has come into being as a direct consequence of capitalism and its fundamental tenets: property and ownership. In his explanation of the second characteristic of the author-function Foucault notes:

> *"Even within our civilization, the same types of texts have not always required authors; there was a time when those texts which we now call 'literary' (stories, folk tales, epics, and tragedies) were accepted, circulated, and valorised without any question of the identity of their author. Their anonymity was ignored because their real or supposed age was a sufficient guarantee of their authenticity. Texts, however, that we now call 'scientific' (dealing with cosmology and the heavens, medicine or illness, the natural sciences or geography) were only considered truthful during the Middle Ages if the name of the author was indicated. Statements on the order of 'Hippocrates said …' or 'Pliny tells us that …' were not merely formulas for an argument based on authority; they marked a proven discourse. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a totally new conception was developed when scientific texts were accepted on their own merits and positioned within an anonymous and coherent conceptual system of established truths and methods of verification. Authentification no longer required reference to the individual who had produced them; the role of the author disappeared as an index of truthfulness and, where it remained as an inventor's name, it was merely to denote a specific theorem or proposition, a strange effect, a property, a body, a group of elements, or pathological syndrome."*[iii]

Accordingly, our conception of the author should not be understood as a given, an indisputable fact of a text; the author is a socially created subject. The primary purpose

of the author in scientific discourse was to establish provisional truths conveyed via a genealogy of respected opinions and ideas; its chief task was to assuage doubt prior to the establishment of experimental methods of verification, and it is also doubt that informs the author-function in the arts, not doubt in relation to truth, but in relation to quality.

> ***"At the same time, however, 'literary' discourse was acceptable only if it carried an author's name; every text of poetry or fiction was obliged to state its author and the date, place, and circumstance of its writing. The meaning and value attributed to the text depended on this information. […] Literary anonymity was of interest only as a puzzle to be solved as, in our day, literary works are totally dominated by the sovereignty of the author."***[iv]

Foucault's questioning of the function of the author was preceded by Barthes' essay '*The Death of the Author'* in which he re-evaluated the text via the semiotic conception of the way language and communication operate. He suggests that our understanding of the text should not be based on its point of origin, the author, but on its destination, the reader, overturning the view established in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries where *"The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author 'confiding' in us."*[v] Such a conception of the author closes the text by transforming writing into a riddle with a solution that can be found in the intentions and biography of its author. Barthes expands on this view in the later essay *From Work to Text* in which he differentiates between the established conception of the literary 'work,' and 'text;' the text demonstrates unlike the closed 'work,' which can only display.

Foucault examines how the attribution of authors operates in discourse, exploring the practical effect of the *death of the author*; while science has replaced the sovereignty of the author with that of methodology the figure of the author as established by Romanticism is yet to abdicate the throne of the arts. The author bestows unity on a body of work[vi] and functions as a means of classification.

> **"We can conclude that, unlike a proper name, which moves from the interior of a discourse to the real person outside who produced it, the name of the**

> **author remains at the contours of texts – separating one from the other, defining their form, and characterizing their mode of existence. It points to the existence of certain groups of discourse and refers to the status of this discourse within a society and a culture. The author's name is not a function of a man's civil status, nor is it fictional; it is situated in the breach, among the discontinuities, which gives rise to new groups of discourse and their singular mode of existence."[vii]**

Thus, for modern criticism the author constitutes a *principle unity in writing*, which is preserved even in the thesis of écriture, which simply transposes the characteristics of an empirical author to a *transcendental anonymity* sustaining the privileges of the author. In the arts the author defines the 'work,' and provides a consensus and guarantee of the quality of works. Thus it operates as a means of relieving the burden of forming our own opinions, of understanding, interpreting, and judging, and of trusting our own taste. The author-function in the arts relieves the fear and doubt associated with being fooled, mocked, duped, outwitted, and failing to understand; it is the facile answer to that perennial criticism of art: "*I could do that.*" Barthes concludes his essay: '*the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author.*'

According to Foucault the natural sciences ceased to attribute authors in the seventeenth century, but the emergence of the social sciences in the eighteenth century required the preservation of the author. To argue with, in order to test, develop, and expand ideas in the social sciences we must be able to locate the units of the argument, the ideas from which each new argument is built. In these instances the author also functions as a corollary of quality by establishing the genealogy of an argument; thus the author has a rhetorical function; the author is a tool of consensus and persuasion in discourse. Every text is a palimpsest, but a map of the topography of these ideas is only necessary in certain kinds of texts, which is tied to their use and purpose; in others it is a hindrance.

There is no single explanation of the purpose of the arts; a broad sketch of theories includes Plato's denouncement of all art as mimicry, Aristotle softened this blow by suggesting that it had a healing or calming function, during the Enlightenment art was justified by its perceived capacity for moral improvement, while Art for Art's Sake made it entirely contingent on aesthetic merit. In the twentieth century John Cage settled on the purpose of music being '*to sober and quiet the mind.*' However, to choose any one of

these is to settle, to decide, but only for now. This brief history tells us that the purpose of art is always provisional; it is contingent on the ideas and opinions in circulation at the time it was created, it is always subject to the discourse of the age. Art has never had a universal purpose capable of transcending discrete discourse, and yet art is, and continues to be. Perhaps the best description of its purpose is expressed in Cage's: '*purposeful purposelessness*.'[viii]

In *Art After Philosophy* Joseph Kosuth argues that art is aloof from both practical application and philosophical presumptions:

> ***"Works of art are analytic propositions. That is, if viewed within their context – as art – they provide no information what-so-ever about any matter of fact. A work of art is a tautology in that it is a presentation of an artist's intention, that is, he is saying that that particular work of art is art, which means, is a definition of art. Thus, that it is art is true a priori (which is what Judd means when he states 'if someone calls it art, its art')."***[ix]

Kosuth concludes from this that art, the authentic art condition, takes the form of a perennial question: '*Art's only claim is for art. Art is the definition of art*.' However, if each definition of art is provisional, located within the discourse of a specific time, this would suggest that the question of art has much in common with the questions posed by the social sciences. A definition delimits and describes the nature, scope and meaning of a thing; thus it represents a description of purpose in the furtherance of knowledge that is equally applicable to history, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and the law. This kind of knowledge is contingent on the authors who have helped to develop and establish the limits of what can be understood by any of these disciplines in order to expand upon existing hypotheses.

In Book 11 of *Confessions* St. Augustine attempts to define time in relation to the following passages from the bible: "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*"[x] and "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*"[xi] In this discussion Augustine characterizes time as *movement and variation*; time *is* only by its impending state of *not being*. The modifications required by the practical function that anchors the social sciences means that to the extent that they are constantly updated via dialectic, ideas are subject to change and variation. The

dialectical process of hypothesis, antithesis, and synthesis, which maps the topography of these disciplines, mirrors Augustine's temporal categories, memory, attention, and expectation defined in relation to the present of consciousness; the past is the present of memory, the present is the present of attention, and the future is the present of expectation. The coordinates on these maps comprise individual authors and their contributions to the discipline. Thus the provisional nature of these kinds of ideas could be defined by their impending state of *not being*. Definition represents a particular kind of knowledge that re-inscribes the author on the palimpsest of the discipline. Kosuth notes that Duchamp's is the first flag planted in the redefinition of art, and there he must remain as the immortal reference of that redefinition.

The question of art conceived as definition preserves an association with temporality and the interweaving of past, present, and future. Barthes proposes that the text freed from attachment to an author establishes a fundamentally different temporality emphasizing the present of reading rather than the past of the text understood through the person of the author.

> ***"The removal of the Author […] is not merely an historical fact or an act of writing; it utterly transforms the modern text (or – which is the same thing – the text is henceforth made and read in such a way that at all its levels the author is absent). The temporality is different. The Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into before and an after. The Author is thought to nourish the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child. In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now."***[xii]

The text without an author simply *is*. In order to resolve the problem of how God could exist and speak outside of time Augustine proposed a second kind of temporality, the temporality of God: eternity. The nature of eternity is stasis; eternity is the never-ending present, the here and now. The acceptance of Kosuth's assertion that works of art are analytic propositions means that art is relieved of any practical function and that it has recourse only to itself. One consequence of this is the refutation of Plato's original

criticism of art; his assertion that all art is a copy of a copy: objects in the material world are copies of ideal forms and art is a copy of those copies, and the recognition of the absolute failure of all realist art.

> ***"[…] art's ability to exist will depend not only on its not performing a service – as entertainment, visual (or other) experience, or decoration – which is something easily replaced by kitsch culture and technology, but rather, it will remain viable by not assuming a philosophical stance; for in art's unique character is the capacity to remain aloof from philosophical judgments. It is in this context that art shares similarities with logic, mathematics and, as well, science. But whereas the other endeavours are useful, art is not. Art indeed exists for its own sake."***[xiii]

The distinction Kosuth makes between art as an analytic proposition and synthetic propositions, which are verifiable by experience, establishes a logical difference between art understood as the definition of art and definition as empirical understanding in the social sciences, however, his preservation of the emphasis on the artist's intention anchors the question of definition in time and discourse. The emphasis on intention and the author, or artist, replaces that which philosophy and aesthetics have historically placed on the art object. Kosuth rejects aesthetics and the corresponding judgments of taste as criteria that define the art condition since aesthetic appreciation is equally applicable to objects which lack any authentic art condition; he views individual art objects as mere relics. The understanding of art as a specific question reliant upon the intentions of the author or artist limits its scope and fixes it in time. The eternal *here and now* of art established by Barthes' *Death of the Author* comprises a complete rejection of both the intention of the author and the text or object as a means of conveying those intentions. If we conceive of art as eternal, the perpetual *here and now*, then the question of art cannot be a question that can be answered; rather, it is the question that each individual expression of art must always answer to. This suggests that the question of art is ontological, it is a question of 'being,' where 'being' is understood according to Heidegger's view that it cannot be contained by, is always prior to, and indeed transcends, signification: 'being' expressed as being ~~being.~~ The term exists with its erased duplicate to emphasize that it is both necessary and inadequate. This describes an eternal state of simultaneous *being* and *not being* rather than the impending state of *not being*. The question of art thus becomes art ~~art~~, or *purposeful purposelessness.*

Intellectual property law is based on the reasonable belief that ideas are intangible and cannot be owned, but it also tells us that the original expression of an idea can be owned when it is material, tangible, fixed. If we understand art as an idea, an eternal idea existing in the form of the perennial question: art ~~art~~, then to honour this moral obligation or law in fiction would be antithetical to the nature of art and would be to make fiction, or any art, answerable to commerce rather than to art. This view repudiates the conception of the author or artist as genius, an invention of Romanticism in the eighteenth century, a period that also established the first copyright laws and marks the beginning of our cultural obsession with the new, novel, and the Novel.

Reference books such as the dictionary and the thesaurus, and for those who believe, the bible, would seem to suggest that texts without authors can maintain an authority equal to and perhaps exceeding that conveyed by a named author. However, all of these authorless texts have authors; in the case of the bible they are a series of witnesses, whose dubious testimony is the subject of David Hume's *Of Miracles*, while the dictionary or thesaurus is always *someone's* dictionary or thesaurus. Denying the subjectivity of the author in fiction has the same effect as emphasizing the author of the reference book; both processes democratize the texts and allow them to function as references. When art operates as a reference in art it exists as part of the eternal conversation that is the question of art. To the extent that it can be used or appropriated to create 'new' art it is the proper function of each individual expression of art, and in order to operate in this way authors quoted in the text cannot be named. To make direct references to other authors in fiction, that is, to apply the author-function, would fragment and splinter the text creating arbitrary hierarchies of taste, quality, and authority within the text. To view art in this way is to understand each expression of art as provisional and contingent like the social sciences, but unlike the social sciences in that each expression is not anchored in time by a positive practical function. No perfect, final expression of the idea of art ever exists, not even for an instant.

Treating fiction in this way makes it as much a part of the construction of fiction as the basic materials of language, words. This practice is by no means a recent invention; writers have always incorporated other writing within their texts. Occasionally it has caused controversy, usually in the form of public moral outrage born of the fear and doubt associated with being *fooled, duped, mocked, or outwitted*. The appropriation of fiction as a reference and the emphasis on the idea of art rather than the individual

expression of art makes all language, all ideas, all texts a part of the material and method of writing and of reading. The established tradition of using other texts to make new texts is substantiated by the recent scholarly revelations of plagiarism in literature. Authors, including the authors of reference books, have always stolen rapaciously from their predecessors, however, this practice has only been seen as theft since the eighteenth century, which, owing to the rise of commercial publishing, and the establishment of copyright law, and the birth of the idea of the artist as genius created the contemporary conditions in which we find artists and authors subject to litigation for a practice that is as old as art itself. Prior to the invention of the printing press fiction was communicated orally; stories were repeated and embellished by each new storyteller. The limits of this practice were established by memory, which was aided by repetition and the limited number of stories in existence. The oral tradition, which was finally and completely usurped by print culture, could only function when what was known and what could be recognized was contained within finite parameters.

The printing press and the birth of the professional author expanded, and continue to expand, these parameters beyond the capacity of any individual person. The cultural appropriations of pop art mimicked the practice of the oral tradition by taking images and references from effortlessly identifiable objects of popular culture. Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes and Campbell's soup cans and Richard Hamilton's collages took from vernacular advertising, impinging on trademarking but not on copyright. This practice, which Dick Hebdige terms '*facetious quotation*' re-contextualized and elevated the image and text of mass culture to the status of art causing many to question the quality of the work, but not its origin or authorship. The modest intellectual legacy of pop, which Hebdige re-evaluates in terms of the democratization of culture, is perhaps caused by the cheap comfort afforded by the easily recognizable cultural references they purloined. Precisely because they take from the fringes of cultural references, from the esoteric, the references of literary fiction are treated with suspicion; they are seen as a species of swindle and subjected to public moral indignation and legal action.

The principle of fair use and the doctrine of scenes à faires have been established as limitations to the rights granted by copyright law. One of the criteria on which breaches of copyright are judged by these caveats is by gauging the value of the thing in breach to the enrichment of society as a whole. The law must mediate between the

rights of the public and the rights of the copyright holder. Public opinion since the Elizabethan period has been quick to decry plagiarism whenever such salacious accusations arise; had these moral offences become criminal ones we might have silenced Shakespeare, Milton, and Eliot. One of the dangers of appropriation, then, is to tread the line between enriching and duping the public, and the outrage ignited by being perceived to *mock, dupe, or outwit* the public is always more keenly felt when the references escape attention.

The transfer of the authority of interpretation and use from the author to the reader, which began with the invention of reference works and the vernacular translation of the bible after the reformation, should apply universally to all texts. The responsibility of interpretation conferred on the reader by the *Death of the Author* is the burden of active participation. Perhaps the recent scholarly revelations of the history of literary plagiarism owe something to the technology we possess today. The Internet provides us with access to information beyond the capacity of any single person, effectively removing the limits of memory and experience that constrained the oral tradition. The Internet is often characterized as the nemesis of copyright the invincible enemy that allows us to use and steal everything it contains, but it also provides the answer to this problem; what we take we can also find. No reference is so esoteric that it cannot be found, uncovered, located, and attributed. The Internet democratizes information by expanding the reference to include not just vernacular cultural information, the material of pop art, but all information. Barthes replaced the old conception of the author with a modern figure, the scriptor,[xiv] whose only power is "*to mix writings, to counter the ones with others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them.*"[xv]

> ***"We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture."***[xvi]

This infinite archive, the Internet, aids the scriptor in the attempt to fulfil the obligation to the question of art and enables the reader to perform his duty to uncover this information following Anthony Wood's imperative: *look it up!* Since all references can be located and any unnamed text can easily be attributed the moral crime of plagiarism becomes

an offense that is committed by the reader not by the author. It consists in the unwillingness of the reader to participate rather than in the refusal of the scriptor to acknowledge other authors. Our ability to interpret and our responsibility in locating the references of a text as its reader might also cause us to question the validity of this moral crime of plagiarism and the effect that this might have its criminal counterpart, copyright.

In *From Work to Text* Barthes argues:

> ***"The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the 'sources,' the 'influences' of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation: the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read: they are quotations without inverted commas."***[xvii]

The process of filiation is a property of the 'work' not the 'text;' '*the metaphor of the text is that of the network*.' In this essay he characterizes 'text' by emphasizing the collaborative role of the reader in relation to text; reading here does not mean comprehension but a kind of writing/reading. 'Text' practices the infinite deferment of the signified, it has no final meaning, nor does it have several meanings; it *accomplishes the very plural of meaning*. Thus for Barthes the identification of references and citations by the reader would render the text closed, however, this process might also be understood as part of the play of writing/ reading that he describes.

> ***"'Playing' must be understood here in all its polysemy: the text itself plays (like a door, like a machine with 'play') and the reader plays twice over, playing the Text as one plays a game, looking for a practice which re-produces it, but, in order that the practice not be reduced to a passive, inner mimesis (the Text is precisely that which resists such a reduction), also playing the Text in the musical sense of the term."***[xviii]

When the 'text' is created from a collage of quotations the practice of identification of those sources re-produces the activity of writing by the scriptor who found and selected those sources and references. The distinction he makes between the two types of reading; reading of the 'work' is associated with the pleasure of consumption, while reading of the 'text' is associated with *jouissance*, the pleasure of participation in which

the cynical criticism of art, *I could do that*, becomes: I am doing that! The Internet has only recently made this relationship between reader and text, understood as a network, possible.

Coincident with the conception of the artist or author as genius was the emphasis Romanticism placed on symbolism rather than allegory. Symbolism served as a justification for aesthetic autonomy; its translucence mediated between the genius of the author and the reader, while, historically, allegory was contingent on collective cultural understanding; it relied upon relatively fixed universal systems of knowledge such as the tenets of Catholicism. Consequently its limits were similar to those of the oral tradition; it could only function within the finite parameters of what could be known, understood, and remembered. Symbolism, by contrast, emphasized the primacy of the individual, the author as genius and translator of divine truths at a time when such systems of knowledge and truth were being questioned, refuted, and repudiated causing the decline of allegory. In the early twentieth century Walter Benjamin's reappraisal of allegory revived it as a radical art practice, which also had philosophical, religious, aesthetic, political, and historical implications. In *Saturn and Melancholy* he suggests that Protestant doctrine, which drained the world of stable meaning, caused the crisis of meaning that is the essence of the allegorical. For Benjamin allegory is no longer a stylistic choice but a predicament that he described as a state of 'petrified unrest.' In his writings on Baudelaire he characterizes it in relation to fashion and the new, nouveauté: the allegorical is the perpetual establishment and de-establishment of value and meaning. This modern understanding of allegory retains its contingent and provisional character, it is always subject to translation, but acknowledges the removal of the stable conceptual basis of interpretation.

The word allegory is derived from the Greek roots 'allos,' meaning 'other,' and 'agoreuein,' 'speaking;' this 'other speaking' is usually understood as meaning other than what is said or not said. In his two-part essay *The Allegorical Impulse* Craig Owens discusses allegory in the context of postmodern thought and art practice.

> ***"Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorical does not invent images but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. And in his hands the image becomes something other (allos = other + agoreuei = to speak). He does not restore an original meaning that may have been lost or obscured; allegory is not hermeneutics. Rather, he adds***

> ***another meaning to the image. If he adds, however, he does so only to replace: the allegorical meaning supplants an antecedent one; it is a supplement."[xix]***

Like Benjamin, Owens connects allegory with impermanence and fragmentation, identifying a connection between it and the practices of appropriation, collage, or quotation. Thus the contemporary use of allegory differentiates it from the symbolic mode of metaphor where the symbolic is characterised as a pure and translucent essence. The allegorical takes, transforms, adds, and juxtaposes; it presents itself and its materials as contingent provisional statements that can and ought to be rethought, reworked, and realigned. The symbolic must always be understood in relation to Plato's conception of mimicry; it designates definitive statements, essences, which necessarily produce copies, whether they take the form of pastiche or emulation by the novice writer, the *sedulous monkey* described by Stevenson. Since it treats all utterances and images as provisional and contingent the allegorical repudiates essence, thus it has no relation to the copy; it steals, and to steal is to take the thing itself, not to copy it.

The conception of allegory as appropriation makes the 'other speaking' implied by its Greek roots literal when this appropriation takes the form of the collage or quotation of either images or words. The term, allegory, also suggests an inherent relationship between writing and reading; it is a process of creating, allegory, and a process of interpretation, allegoresis. The term 'Allegoria' superseded 'hyponoia' marking a change of emphasis from 'under meaning' to 'other speaking,' which underscores Owens' view that *allegory is not hermeneutics*; the text is thus understood as 'speaking' rather than 'meaning.' In part two of the *Allegorical Impulse* Owens describes this emphasis in relation to the postmodern preoccupation with reading, discourse, and the second-person address.

> ***"[…] it should be remembered that allegories are frequently exhortative, addressed to the reader in an attempt to manipulate him or to modify his behaviour. [...] This shift from history to discourse, from a third- to a second-person mode of address, also accounts for the centrality which postmodernist art assigns to the reader/ spectator […]"[xx]***

Allegory inherently invites participation and the incorporation of the other voice both in the process of creating and in the process of reading.

Barthes notes in *Death of the Author* that the reign of the author has also been the reign of the critic.

> ***"Hence there is no surprise in the fact that historically, the reign of the Author has also been that of the critic, nor again in the fact that criticism (be it new) is today undermined along with the Author. In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be disentangled, nothing deciphered; the structure can be followed, 'run' (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. In precisely this way literature (it would be better from now on to say writing), by refusing to assign a 'secret,' an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what might be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and hypostases – reason, science, law."***[xxi]

The emphasis on reading eliminated both the roles of author and critic; denied the power to either interpret or bestow quality judgments on art, the critic's role has been relegated to one of description; the critic provides synopses on the basis of which the reader or spectator may decide to engage with the text or artwork. Art exists now without its age-old companion in dialogue or discourse, criticism. In practice the emphasis on the reader has meant the shying away from the dialectical practices of criticism; the reader is trusted to form their own opinion, but not trusted to actively participate in a dialogue with the critic, lest the views the critic expresses impinge on those of the reader. Individual judgments and opinions of readers may be made public via the Internet, but they rarely form the kind of provocative and essential dialogue that has historically nourished and encouraged art.

Oscar Wilde's *Intentions* includes three dialogues: *The Decay of Lying*, and the two-part dialogue *The Critic as Artist: With Some Remarks Upon The Importance Of Doing Nothing*, and *The Critic as Artist: With Some Remarks Upon The Importance Of Discussing Everything*. The former consists of a discussion of the doctrines of the new aesthetics, Art for Art's Sake, and the refutation of realism. Wilde insists upon the separation of art and life, privileging the imaginative rather than mimetic function of art and emphasizing art's power to make rather than to copy. He reverses Platonic doctrine suggesting that life

imitates art, not vice versa. This dialogue concludes: *'The final revelation is that Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of art.'*[xxii] The two dialogues that comprise *The Artist as Critic* discuss the symbiotic relationship between art and criticism. In these dialogues Wilde emphasizes the importance of the critical faculty in creativity and of creativity in criticism. He subverts Matthew Arnold's view of criticism as disinterested and unbiased, which should see '*the object as in itself it really is;'* proposing instead that the critic should be allowed to see '*the object as in itself it really is not*.' The character, Ernest, summarizes the discussion at the end of the second dialogue:

> ***"You have told me that it is more difficult to talk about a thing than to do it, and that to do nothing at all is the most difficult thing in the world; you have told me that all Art is immoral, and all thought dangerous; that criticism is more creative than creation, and that the highest criticism is that which reveals in the work of Art what the artist had not put there; that it is exactly because a man cannot do a thing that he is the proper judge of it; and that the true critic is unfair, insincere, not rational. My friend, you are a dreamer."***[xxiii]

The purpose of criticism is not to explain a work of art, but to deepen its mystery. According to Wilde, *"To the critic the work of art is simply a suggestion for a new work of his own, that need not necessarily bear any obvious resemblance to the thing it criticises."* [xxiv]

Wilde emphasizes the importance of criticism for art.

> ***"An age that has no criticism is either an age in which art is immobile, hieratic, and confined to the reproduction of formal types, or an age that possesses no art at all. There have been critical ages that have not been creative, in the ordinary sense of the word, ages in which the spirit of man has sought to set in order the treasures of his treasure-house, to separate the gold from the silver, and the silver from the lead, to count over the jewels, and to give names to the pearls. But there has never been a creative age that has not been critical also. For it is the critical faculty that invents fresh forms. The tendency of creation is to repeat itself. It is to the critical instinct that we owe each new school that springs up, each new mould that art finds ready to its hand."***[xxv]

Thus the death of the critic appears to be a greater loss than the death of the author. In his essay *On Oscar Wilde* Borges likens Wilde's legacy to that of Gibbon, Johnson, and Voltaire, '*he was a wit; a wit who was also right.*'[xxvi] The views on criticism he expresses in *Intentions* of 1891 share many similarities with those expressed by Jacques Derrida in the latter half of the twentieth century who treated the object of criticism as the impetus for a creative critical practice.

Barthes replaced the author with the new role, scriptor, but the critic has been condemned to the purgatory of polite description. Perhaps all that is required to revive the role of the critic is a rearrangement of the subject positions: scriptor, critic (observer),[xxvii] and reader. The emphasis Wilde places on creativity in criticism and its purpose, *to deepen the mystery of the text* suggests a new role for the scriptor: the scriptor-as-critic. If the work *produced* by the scriptor comprises allegorical appropriation, the quotation and collage of other voices, the scriptor is in the unique position of being able to perform both allegory and allegoresis: the composition and the interpretation of the text. This rearrangement makes the scriptor-as-critic just another reader, since the texts he composes have been appropriated, quoted, collaged, and re-arranged, he remains, like any other reader, an outside observer of the text, but the scriptor-as-critic maintains a privileged knowledge of the text which is beyond that of the general reader. To suggest that the scripter take up the role of critic will immediately raise the suspicion of bias, but as Wilde notes:

> "***A critic cannot be fair in the ordinary sense of the word. It is only about things that do not interest one that one can give a really unbiased opinion, which is no doubt the reason why an unbiased opinion is always absolutely valueless. The man who sees both sides of a question, is a man who sees absolutely nothing at all. Art is a passion, and, in matters of art, Thought is inevitably coloured by emotion, and so is fluid rather than fixed, and, depending upon fine moods and exquisite moments, cannot be narrowed into the rigidity of a scientific formula or a theological dogma. It is to the soul that Art speaks, and the soul may be made the prisoner of the mind as well as of the body. One should, of course, have no prejudices; but, as a great Frenchman remarked a hundred years ago, it is one's business in such matters to have preferences, and when one has preferences one ceases to be fair. It is only an auctioneer who can equally and impartially admire all schools of Art. No; fairness is not one of the qualities of the true critic. It is not even a condition of criticism.***" [xxviii]

Furthermore, criticism understood in this way is not of the variety that insists on conferring quality judgments and lauding authors; it functions in parallel with the text. The scriptor-as-critic is a guide: the critic is revived as Virgil. The symbiotic process of allegory and allegoresis implied by this is a relationship established in time; the moment of composing is subject to different relationships of ideas and connections than those revealed in the moment of reading; the lacuna between them differentiates between the two roles.

Unlike traditional allegory, which relied upon fixed, stable cultural codes to operate, postmodern allegory and allegoresis works with the fleeting, the unstable and the esoteric. It also has a recuperative quality, preserving what might otherwise be lost; thus it necessarily incorporates ephemeral and esoteric information. The identification of these references forms the duty, responsibility, or burden of the reader but the role of guide by that unique reader, the scriptor-as-critic, is also a responsibility; Foucault notes that at the moment the author became a figure in society he was obliged to take responsibility for the texts associated with his name; the benefit of property rights came with accountability.

> ***"In our culture – undoubtedly in others as well – discourse was not originally a thing, a product, or a possession, but an action situated in a bipolar field of sacred and profane, lawful and unlawful, religious and blasphemous. It was a gesture charged with risks long before it became a possession caught in a circuit of property values. But it was at the moment when a system of ownership and strict copyright rules were established (toward the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century) that the transgressive properties always intrinsic to the act of writing became the forceful imperative of literature. At that moment the author was accepted into the social order of property which governs our culture, the author compensated for his new status by reviving the older bipolar field of discourse in a systematic practice of transgression and by restoring the danger of writing which, on another side, has been conferred the benefits of property."***[xxix]

Like Wilde, Foucault notes the immoral and criminal nature of writing and authorship.

Transgressive ideas reflect the discourse of a particular time; the history of banned or censored books illuminates bygone mores and socio-political circumstances. *De Tribus*

Impostoribus[xxx] is a book that was neither written nor published; it was first used by the Catholic Church in their accusations of heresy against the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II. He was the first to be attributed as the author of this book in which he supposedly detailed that the three imposters, Muhammad, Jesus, and Moses misrepresented what had happened to them in the testimony that established their religions. Over the next five hundred years its authorship was ascribed to numerous adversaries of the church, including the philosopher Spinoza, as was deemed necessary in the course of their pogroms. It was reputedly published during the Enlightenment, and although it's not clear that this really was the case, its title certainly survived in infamy; in 1770 Voltaire published a response to this book '*Letter to the author of The Three Imposters*,' in which he states: '*If God didn't exist, it would be necessary to invent him.*'

Whether or not *De Tribus Impostoribus* was written or published during the period the Church claimed, the content bears a remarkable resemblance to Hume's essay, *Of Miracles*. It is also the title of the Internet play I made for the online magazine, Triple Canopy, in 2010. This three-act play comprises a dialogue on the nature of language, testimony, and telementation via the ideas expressed by Socrates (Platonic), Aristotle, Locke, Hume, and Heidegger. Large parts of this text are built from original sources; these texts range in date from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century. These sources point to, without naming, a historical figure whose influence was felt in both art and science; references to this forgotten figure can be traced in the history of literature through Dante, Boccaccio, Hogg, and Sir Walter Scott; he was the first to translate Averroes and Avicenna and, most importantly, Aristotle (breaking Plato's monopoly on Western thought); he also revised and edited Fibonacci's *Liber Abaci*. None of these sources are named in the text, but all of them can be traced and recovered online; the play takes advantage of the Internet as both a forum for presentation and the preeminent research tool of our age. The common reference of these sources would reveal this historical figure (they might also reveal other figures and ideas common to these texts); the unnamed author provides a means of exploiting the technology of the Internet and inviting the participation of the reader, but it is not a riddle that must necessarily be solved; to question his disappearance from history is to question the bias of history, as Wilde proclaimed in *The Artist as Critic*: '*The One duty we owe history is to re-write it.*' The experiment he conducted to ascertain if language is innate is his predominant influence on these three dialogues that educe a relationship between the nature of religion and the nature of language.

It has been my argument that to have acknowledged these authors within the text would have been to splinter and fragment the text into a series of arbitrary hierarchies of taste, quality, and authority. The purpose of listing some of these sources here is twofold: to illustrate the ways in which disparate sources can form a unity which is preserved and can only serve the question of art ~~art~~ by abstaining from naming these sources within the text, and to illustrate how this method of appropriation suggests the new role of the scriptor: scriptor-as-critic.

Heidegger's theory of the nature of dialogue in which he suggests that hints, not direct answers to increasingly precise questions, provided the stimulus for the dialogues in both *De Tribus Impostoribus* and the story in the form of a dialogue that begins this book, *Aporia*. The latter comprises poetry by T.S. Eliot, Samuel Beckett, Oscar Wilde, Jorge Luis Borges, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, and Philip Larkin; excerpts from the letters of Héloïse to Abélard, and texts by Evelyn Waugh, James Joyce, Locke, and Spinoza as well as dialogues by Plato and Heidegger. It also contains the concluding words of the geologist James Hutton's 1788 paper on geology and geological time and the inscription from the gravestone of a man buried in St. Paul's Churchyard, Chestertown, Maryland.

The presence of other authors in this text is immediately apparent from its form, which employs poems as prayers punctuating the span of a single day via the canonical hours of the breviary. The poems selected were specifically chosen, which is not to say that they necessarily convey a hidden meaning, or should be deciphered as a kind of riddle; they provide a structure and say something about the idea of love, the subject of this dialogue. The selection should also be understood to acknowledge that other choices exist in parallel to the ones I made; the instance of 'love poem' is inherently tied to the category love poetry; it is an archetype. This dialogue treats love as a form of communication, which operates like language and is also subject to hermeneutic interpretation and misinterpretation. The use of love poetry, which also evokes the archetype 'love poetry,' underscores that any definition or understanding of the nature of love expressed in language is contingent and provisional. The poetry has an allegorical function, the appropriation of these 'other voices' operate, create, and suggest an infinite list adumbrating this ineffable subject. Byron and Shelley are more usually associated with the subject than Borges, Eliot, Larkin, Beckett, or even Wilde; to include their names in the text would have immediately created a hierarchy of authority

within this list, without it their voices are heard with equal, but provisional, authority. Shelley's is perhaps the most famous poem in this selection, its recognisability makes immediate reference to the archetype 'love poem,' it is as obvious and as comforting as Warhol's soup cans and Brillo boxes.

In this story love is treated allegorically; allegory is a mode of writing about that which we cannot know or articulate: God, Love, Truth. The instances of love poetry, which refer to the archetype 'love poem' function like Umberto Eco's 'Topos of Ineffability:' *the use of a list as a specimen or indication of an immeasurably large or unknown thing;*' they refer to the relationship between the sayable and unsayable and highlight the provisional nature of what has been said. As James Joyce noted in a letter about *Finnegans Wake*: '*One great part of every human existence is passed in a state which cannot be rendered sensible by the use of wideawake language, cutanddry grammar and goahead plot.'* The absence of the names of the individual authors that contribute to this text confers unity on the new text; the text speaks with a uniform voice that has no intention of answering the question, what is love, but simply asks it, and asks it in relation to every text ever written on the subject within the frame of the question of art: art ~~art~~. The texts speak and the text speaks; '*what matter who's speaking'*[xxxi]

In the *Open Work* Eco proposes a more complex relationship of author to reader than that advocated by Barthes, who only concedes that: "*It is not that the Author may not 'come back' in the Text, in his text, but he then does so as a 'guest.'*"[xxxii] Open works retain the formative intentions of their authors, but they always leave room, expressed as ambiguity, which invites and requires the participation of the reader. This ambiguity must be preserved and nurtured by the scriptor-as-critic. Wilde's view of the role of criticism to *deepen the mystery of the text,* and his suggestion that the work of art serve as inspiration for a new critical text, which need not bear any obvious resemblance to the thing it criticizes, emphasizes the dialectical nature of the relationship between author and critic. The reappraisal of the text by the scriptor-as-critic ensures the vitality of this dialectic; the lacuna between composing and reading fosters new insights and provides the stimulus for new texts. It would be impractical to imagine that anyone other than the scriptor-as-critic could function in this role; who but Joyce could *deepen the mystery* of Finnegans Wake? The innumerable critics and academics that have compiled the endless volumes and keys to Joyce's text can never speak of it with the privilege that is granted only to its composer. Thus the scriptor-as-critic is uniquely situated to guide us

through the confusing abyss of information that Eliot describes: "*Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"*[xxxiii]

This essay was preceded by a quotation from Lewis Carroll's '*Through the Looking-*Glass': '*The question is whether you can make words mean so many different things.*[xxxiv]' The question of meaning has been relegated to a lesser position in the conception of the text as that which 'speaks;' meaning is immaterial, it is constantly deferred, and is never final or fixed. It is implicit in the allegorical practice of appropriation that words, quotations, can 'speak' or 'mean' different things depending on the context in which they appear. This practice is foregrounded by the view that there is no final, perfect expression of art, *not even for an instant,* and that the constant re-evaluation, reappraisal, and re-contextualization of these ideas is in the service of the perennial question of art: art ~~art~~. Consequently, the moral and criminal crimes, plagiarism and copyright, are not applicable to art or fiction created in this way. The legal rights conferred by usufruct suggest a more appropriate way of governing and understanding appropriation in art; usufruct pertains to the legal right to use and derive profit or benefit from property that either belongs to another person or which is under common ownership, so long as the property is not damaged or destroyed. The seventeenth century lexicographer and legal scholar, Thomas Blount, defines 'usufructuary' as "*One that hath the use, and reaps the profit of any thing."*[xxxv] The term is derived from the Latin expression usus et fructus, use and enjoyment. Usufruct acknowledges the existence of that which is beyond the rights conferred by legal ownership and authorship. While copyright affords the benefit of income to those it protects it should not be used to prevent the use of that which can only be governed by art ~~art.~~

The legal ramifications of appropriation and copyright inform our understanding of the maxim, *talent borrows, genius steals*. Wilde and Foucault's characterizations of the artist or writer as immoral, liar, dissident, underscore the criminal aspect of the artist, but the view of the author as genius has been eradicated. Within the frame of the conception of art as an eternal ontological question perhaps it should be rephrased as: artists borrow, art steals. In this configuration it is art that bears the stigma of immorality and criminality; art becomes the master criminal, Moriarty, the nemesis of the master detective, Holmes, who, in turn, becomes the emblem of the reader and the scriptor. Holmes takes cases simply because they interest him; he neither encompasses nor professes moral or ethical superiority; that the case be 'interesting' is his sole requirement,

and when his mind is not stimulated he becomes listless and dabbles in cocaine to stave off the ennui and unrest; he is stimulated only to the extent that he is actively participating. Similarly, Barthes equates boredom with reading to the reduction of reading to consumption. The reader and the scriptor-as-reader, like Holmes, crave participation and retain a tinge of immorality and criminality. It is only the appearance of Moriarty in *The Final Problem* that transforms Holmes into an ethical champion; his hypocritical moral and ethical position is a consequence of the sinister presence of the master criminal.

> **"Ay, there's the genius and the wonder of the thing! The man pervades London, and no one has heard of him. […] As you are aware, Watson, there is no one who knows the higher criminal world of London so well as I do. For years past I have continually been conscious of some powers behind the malefactor, some deep organizing power which forever stands in the way of the law, and throws its shield over the wrongdoer. Again and again in cases of the most varying sorts – forgery cases, robberies, murders – I have felt the presence of this force, and I have deduced its action in in many of those undiscovered crimes in which I have not been personally consulted. For years I have endeavoured to break through the veil which shrouded it, until it led me, after a thousand cunning windings, to ex-Professor Moriarty […]."**[xxxvi]

Artists borrow, art steals.

Victoria Miguel

[i] Robert Louis Stevenson, *A College Magazine*, The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson. P 38

[ii] Michel Foucault, *What is an Author?, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. PP 130 - 131

[iii] Ibid. PP 125 - 126

[iv] Ibid. P 126

[v] Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author*, Image, Music, Text. P 143

[vi] Foucault notes that the unity conferred by the author has no logical limit and could arguably include anything they *produced* including their bills and shopping lists.

[vii] Michel Foucault, *What is an Author?, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. PP 123

[viii] 'Purposeful purposelessness or a purposeless play.' John Cage, *Experimental Music*, Silence. P 12

[ix] Joseph Kosuth, *Art After Philosophy,* Art in Theory 1900 – 200: An Anthology of Changing Ideas. P 857

[x] King James Bible, Genesis 1:1

[xi] King James Bible, John 1:1

[xii] Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author*, Image, Music, Text. P 145

[xiii] Joseph Kosuth, *Art After Philosophy,* Art in Theory 1900 – 200: An Anthology of Changing Ideas. P 860

[xiv] The new term, 'scriptor,' allowed Barthes to sever the relationship between author and authority.

[xv] Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author*, Image, Music, Text. P 146

[xvi] Ibid. P 146

[xvii] Roland Barthes, *From Work to Text*, Image, Music, Text. P 160

[xviii] Ibid. P 162

[xix] Craig Owens, *The Allegorical Impulse Part 1* October Vol. 12 (Spring, 1980). P 69

[xx] Craig Owens, *The Allegorical Impulse Part 2* October Vol. 13 (Summer, 1980). P 67

[xxi] Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author*, Image, Music, Text. P 148

[xxii] This characterization of the artist as immoral or criminal is also expressed in '*Pen, Pencil, and Poison – A Study in Green,'* also included in *Intentions*, in which he tells the story of the artist, writer, and poisoner, Thomas Griffiths Wainewright.

[xxiii] Oscar Wilde, *The Artist as Critic* The Artist as Critic. P 407

[xxiv] Ibid. P 369

[xxv] Ibid. P356 - 357

[xxvi] Jorge Luis Borges, *On Oscar Wilde,* Selected Non-Fictions. P 315

[xxvii] In *From Work to Text* Barthes expresses the three roles as: "*writer, reader, and observer (critic)*." P 156

[xxviii] Oscar Wilde, *The Artist as Critic* The Artist as Critic. P392

[xxix] Michel Foucault, *What is an Author? Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. PP 124 - 125

[xxx] Translated: The Three Imposters.

[xxxi] Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, quoted in Foucault Op Cit. P 115

[xxxii] Roland Barthes, *From Work to Text*, Image, Music, Text. P 161

[xxxiii] T.S. Eliot, *The Rock, (1934)*

[xxxiv] Chapter VI of '*Through the Looking*-Glass' is one of the texts on which the short story, *Rondo*, that follows this essay is based.

[xxxv] Thomas Blount Nomo-Lexicon: A Law Dictionary 1670

[xxxvi] Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Final Problem,* Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories, Volume 1. PP 739 - 740