The question is which is to be master – that's all.

On Materials

The preceding words and quotations were compiled over a period of about twenty years. While the quotations are the product of research, selected for a particular purpose, the words are those which I have collected either because they convey something very specific, or because of the beauty of their form. The more esoteric of these words date my list; I have had 'fairlec' in mind for more than a decade, waiting for the right occasion to use it; I can remember coming across 'propinquity' in 2006. 'Tethneka' is perhaps the oldest, dating to when I studied Ancient Greek with Mr Brown in the early 1990's; the Scots words are both old and new: I once lived above a pub called Stravaigin in Glasgow, while I came across 'lallan' only last year. I could not begin to date the common words: 'and,' 'disappointed,' and 'acre;' they probably appeared on the set of flashcards I had as a child and have been with me ever since. They are old friends that delight me as much as 'asperity,' 'peroration,' and 'vultuous.'

Although the majority of this list was gathered in a haphazard way as a private repository of vocabulary, a habit common to most writers, categories of words are discernable. In the diagrams that follow, these are mapped according to either their definition or the anecdote by which I illustrate the word. These categories include: Scots, Space, Time, Beauty, Rain, John Cage, Language, Morality, Truth/ Doubt/ Argument, Temperament; Etymology, Dictionary, Samuel Johnson, John Locke, Peter Mark Roget, Thesaurus, Fiction, Cosmology, Philosophy, Voltaire, Chess, Monkey, and Boredom. Some of these: beauty, temperament, chess, and monkey, were rather surprising, while the categories that delineate the vocabulary of language, space, and time were entirely expected. What, then, do I mean to convey by favourite?

Favourite implies *a person or thing regarded with peculiar favour or preferred above others*, and despite the categories that have subsequently emerged, this list is chiefly a list of words to which I am partial: 'fairlec' certainly, but also, 'blithe,' 'dreich,' 'lacuna,' 'glamour,' and 'scacchic' are particular favourites in this sense. The principal category, then, is me: my interests, my taste, and my intention to use these words. In his preface to *The Order of Things* Foucault quotes, from Borges' *The Analytical Language of John Wilkins*, the taxonomy of 'a certain Chinese encyclopaedia' entitled *The Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*, which categorizes animals according to the

following 14 types: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) those included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies. Borges compares this entry to examples of categories from Wilkins' system for a universal language, which reformulates language via an alphabetical code based on his classification of knowledge; where stones are divided into: common (flint, gravel, slate), moderate (marble, amber, coral), precious (pearls, opals), transparent (amethyst, sapphire), and insoluble (coal, fuller's earth, and arsenic), and metals are either: imperfect (vermillion, quicksilver), artificial (bronze, brass), recremental (filings, rust), or natural (gold, tin, copper).

> **"The impossibility of penetrating the divine scheme of the universe cannot, however, dissuade us from planning human schemes, even though it is clear that they are provisional. Wilkins' analytic language is not the least remarkable of those schemes. The classes and species that compose it are contradictory and vague; the artifice of using the letters of the words to indicate divisions and subdivisions is undoubtedly ingenious. The word *salmon* tells us nothing; *zana*, the corresponding word, defines (for the person versed in the forty categories and the classes of those categories) a scaly river fish with reddish flesh. [...]"**[i]

Athanasius Kircher's *Novum Inventum Linguarum Omnium*, published in 1660, proposes a system for a universal language similar to that of Wilkins, but his language is expressed through iconograms rather than the alphabetical code adopted by Wilkins; both languages derive from a system of classification of knowledge with the intention of disseminating that knowledge as widely as possible. Their attempts represent the will to facilitate communication among international scholars anticipated by Thomas Urquhart's *Logopandect*eision of 1653: a satiric and insincere plan for a universal language, and anticipating John Locke's views on the importance of clear communication for the development of knowledge in his essays on language in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* of 1690. The seventeenth century passion for the quantification and delineation of language, as a means of establishing what could logically be known, extended to subjecting language to mathematical calculations such as Paul Guldin's analysis of the number of words that could be produced by the twenty-three letters of the alphabet in use in 1622, and Leibniz's *Horizon de la Doctrine Humaine*

of 1693, which attempts to ascertain the maximum number of statements that could be created using an alphabet of twenty-four letters.

Foucault reproduces the Chinese taxonomy from Borges' essay to highlight, by the contrast, the ways in which order conceals the biases and limitations of our thinking. From the perspective of Western epistemology the order created by the alphabetical listing of these categories is arbitrary and impractical. The taxonomy of the Chinese encyclopaedia fails as a system because it destroys the stability of the relationship between the container and the contained: if all animals can be divided into these categories then all of those can in turn be placed in category (h); and that division can only exist in language, beyond the space of practical existence.

> ***"It is not the 'fabulous' animals that are impossible, since they are designated as such, but the narrowness of the distance separating them from (and juxtaposing them to) the stray dogs, or the animals that from a long way off look like flies. What transgresses the boundaries of all imagination, of all possible thought, is simply that alphabetical series (a, b, c, d) which links each of those categories to all of the others. […] What is impossible is not the propinquity of the things listed, but the very site on which their propinquity would be possible. The animals '(i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush' – where could they ever meet, except in the immaterial sound of the voice pronouncing their enumeration, or on the page transcribing it? Where else could they be juxtaposed except in the non-place of language?"***[ii]

While Borges concludes that Wilkins' system is as equally arbitrary and speculative as the Chinese encyclopaedia (and his third example of The Bibliographic Institute of Brussels) because his taxonomies no longer correspond to contemporary knowledge, Foucault would acknowledge that they are simply of their time: 1668. Borges concludes:

> **"[…] obviously there is no classification of the universe that is not arbitrary and speculative. The reason is quite simple: we do not know what the universe is. 'The world,' wrote David Hume, 'was only the first rude essay of some infant deity who afterwards abandoned it, ashamed of his lame performance; it is the work only of some dependent, inferior deity, and is the object of derision to his superiors; it is the production of old age and dotage in some superannuated deity, and ever since his death has run on …' (Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion V [1779]). We must go even further, and suspect that there is no universe in the organic,**

> **unifying sense of that ambitious word. If there is, then we must speculate on its purpose; we must speculate on the words, definitions, etymologies, synonymies of God's secret dictionary."[iii]**

Implicit in this is that we once possessed a clear and definite idea of what we meant by 'universe.' Writing about Homer's description of Achilles' shield in book XVIII of the Iliad Umberto Eco notes: "*Homer was able to construct (or imagine) a closed form because he had a clear idea of the agricultural and warrior culture of his own day. He knew his world, he knew its laws, causes and effects. This is why he was able to give it a form.*"[iv] Foucault differentiates between epistemologies of distinct periods; during the classical period[v], 1650 – 1800, our system of order was predicated on the empirical theory of representation, the preliminary criterion being difference and similitude; order was created according to the innate quality of a thing that distinguishes it from other things, and through language. The taxonomies of Wilkins and Kircher as well as Johnson's dictionary and Diderot's *Encyclopédie* exemplify this world-view.

As illustrated by Borges' essay the coherence of this empirical order gave way to an increasingly relative view in the modern period; Truth dissolved into personal truths where no objective view of the universe could be sustained, and 'universe' ceased to be a 'thing' and became a 'word' subject to interpretation not according to God's secret dictionary but our own. Knowledge suspended in language without recourse to the practical fosters a more treacherous order than the simply incongruous: it promotes a disorder in which innumerable possible orders proliferate formed on relationships too nebulous and provisional to sustain them. Language, once the conduit of order, has become the instrument of chaos. This characterization is reminiscent of Kant's conception of the sublime: "*When Kant had a sense of the sublime when gazing up at the starry sky, he had the (subjective) feeling that what he was seeing went beyond his sensibilities, and so he postulated an infinity that not only our senses fail to grasp but one that not even our imagination can embrace; an uneasy pleasure which makes us feel the greatness of our subjectivity, capable of wishing for something we cannot have.*"[vi] To which I would add an element of Edmund Burke's impression of the sublime: astonishment. "*Astonishment, […] is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence, and respect.*"[vii] The rather eccentric mathematical equations of Guldin and Leibniz could not hope to grasp the nature of language, as we now understand it.

> ***"But let it be considered that hardly any thing can strike the mind with its greatness, which does not make some sort of approach to infinity; which nothing can do while we are able to perceive its bounds; but to see an object distinctly, and to see its bounds, is one and the same thing. A clear idea is therefore another name for a little idea."***[viii]

Although a trace of the classical epistemological tradition based on binary oppositions is preserved in my list in pairs such as 'abderian' and 'agelastic,' the distinctions between 'acedia' and 'boredom,' 'apodictic' and 'apodeictic,' and 'refute' and 'repudiate:' *synonyms are not synonymous*; it makes no attempt at order in the classical sense. Consequently the categories: Scots, Space, Time, Beauty, Rain, John Cage, Language, Morality, Truth/ Doubt/ Argument, Temperament; Etymology, Dictionary, Samuel Johnson, John Locke, Peter Mark Roget, Thesaurus, Fiction, Cosmology, Philosophy, Voltaire, Chess, Monkey, and Boredom, are simultaneously incongruous and not at all; as Eco notes, a practical list is never incongruous if we can identify the criterion of assembly governing it. My list, which is just that; mine, is also a product of my thinking at a particular point in time; any earlier or later and a slightly different list would have been created. This is best illustrated in the group of quotations many of which pertain to the idea of 'roundness' collected for use in the short story *Rondo* at the end of this book. I can keep a word for years, but a quotation is almost immediately put to use. Were I to compile the list of words afresh today the following additions would immediately be made: 'haptic,' 'sybaritic,' 'prolix,' 'antinomian,' 'hyperborean,' 'pantechnicon,' and 'psittacism.'

Eco's examples of practical lists include dictionaries, phone books, library catalogues, the list of assets in a will, restaurant menus, and shopping lists. He outlines their three characteristics as; having a purely referential function; finite, since they record things that are really extent or known; and that they may not be altered since to do so would be either unethical or pointless. The latter of these suggests that all practical lists represent a moment in time, all may be altered, but each alteration produces a new list.

Despite their didactic intentions, the earliest English dictionaries, those of Mulcaster (1582), Coote (1596), and Cawdrey (1604), reveal the authors' tastes and biases. Mulcaster's *Elementaire*, a list of 8000 words without definitions, addressed the burgeoning importance of English after the reformation and made an attempt to standardize spelling. Coote's *The English School-Maister*, from which Cawdrey borrowed

extensively, was designed for equally pedagogical purposes. Cawdrey's *Table Alphabeticall* was the first true monolingual English dictionary; its full title: *A Table Alphabeticall conteyning and teaching the true writing, and understanding of hard usuall English words, borrowed from the Hebrew, Greeke, Latine, or French, &c. with the interpretation thereof by plaine English words, gathered for the benefit & help of ladies, gentlewomen, or any other unskilled persons. Whereby they may the more easilie and better understand many hard English wordes, which they shall heare or reade in scriptures, sermons, or elsewhere, and also be made able to use the same aptly themselves*, divulges the particular intentions of its author. Although attempts were made in the seventeenth century, notably by Thomas Blount and Edward Phillips, not until Johnson in the eighteenth century would anyone attempt to capture the entirety of the English language in all its rich variety, and even his diligent and laudable work famously omitted 'molecule' and 'aardvark.' The greatest number of neologisms in the English language occurred in the Elizabethan period due to an increase in international trade and exploration as well as home-grown linguistic creativity. Cawdrey's catalogue of common, difficult, words tried to document this influx, which, like the efforts of Mulcaster and Coote, was made necessary by the elevation of English from vernacular to official language. Although each new author of an English dictionary borrowed heavily from his predecessors these practical lists are always the product of each author's time and subjective biases; the cataloguing of the English language from 1582 until the first edition of the OED in 1928 has never been a purely scientific project: each new dictionary has always been *someone's* dictionary.

The shift in authority from preacher to individual members of the congregation resulting from the reformation and the subsequent English language versions of the Bible; beginning with Thomas Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer* (1549) and culminating in the *King James Bible* of 1611, might be seen as the first step towards the reflexive relationship with language and the world that Foucault describes as being characteristic of the modern period. Although these religious works were still believed to contain the literal word and authority of God, the task of interpreting these texts was placed in the hands of the individual. The expression, '*to look something up,*' was coined by the antiquarian Anthony Wood in 1692. The early dictionaries that emerged as a consequence of this change generated the category 'reference,' which has included Johnson's dictionary and Roget's thesaurus, and is now epitomized by the OED and the HTOED:[ix] works that are simply that, points of reference for individual contemplation and use.

Samuel Johnson, the author of the first great work of English lexicography, his dictionary of 1755, characterized his project in the following way: "*My idea of an English dictionary*" is one "*by which the pronunciation of our language may be fixed, and its attainment facilitated; by which its purity may be preserved, its use ascertained, and its duration lengthened.*"[x] In selecting quotations on which to base his dictionary, and for use in illustrating his headwords, Johnson eschewed the convenient: requiring his literary gamut to be exemplary of morality, scholarship, everyday wisdom, and literary value. The authors he quoted most frequently were Dryden, Milton, Pope, Addison, Bacon, Swift, Locke, and Philip Sidney. His dictionary also contains 4,617 Bible quotations, mostly from the Old Testament, many examples from Shakespeare and Wilkins; he quotes himself thirty-three times (sometimes as anonymous), but he omitted Hobbes because he thought him wicked, and surprisingly there isn't a single quotation of Marlowe; presumably there was also no literary instance of 'molecule' or 'aardvark;' lexicography based on literature will always miss something. The only regionalism in his dictionary is Scots, perhaps due to the five Scottish assistants who aided him in his task. Despite also being the model of the OED under the stewardship of James Murray, Johnson's emphasis on literature as source and the writer as user, caused Murray to remark that Johnson thought of lexicography as a department of literature. A number of Johnson's biases are preserved in the OED including his inconsistent spelling and the emphasis on Scots, which remains by far the most fully represented regionalism.

Johnson imposed temporal limits on his literary sources; the earliest text he allocated for use was Sidney's *Arcadia* (1581) and to avoid partiality he shunned contemporary authors, although he deviates from these restrictions to quote himself and a small selection of his contemporaries as well as Chaucer and Thomas More. Johnson's project differs from the prototype dictionaries and linguistic and philosophical projects of the seventeenth century, which were based on the belief that language could embody the order of existence. The eighteenth century Enlightenment passion for organization, structure, and methodology emphasized the reference work as a necessary and fashionable tool; it produced Diderot's *Encyclopédie* (1751) and the first Encyclopaedia Britannica (1768 – 71). For all the inclusiveness of these dictionaries and encyclopaedias each edition preserves and reveals biases mapping a particular moment in time and a distinct understanding of the world. The desire for and comfort of order indicated by the

aims and achievements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are personified in Peter Mark Roget.

Roget's *Thesaurus* began as an avocation that functioned primarily as a means of coping with his anxiety and depression; his list of synonyms provided comfort both in the act of making and compiling and in later life as a reference work for his scientific and medical writings and lectures. Begun in 1805, but not published until 1852, it was inspired by the lectures on language by Dugald Stewart that he had attended while studying medicine at the University of Edinburgh. Since earlier synonym lists had lacked philosophical cohesion Roget adopted the thematic conceptual arrangement of forty classes[xi] from Wilkins as the structural underpinning of his list and applied the methodology of the philologist John Horne Tooke who believed that all parts of speech could be traced back to nouns and verbs. Roget created a map of relations rather than meanings revealing a new way of looking at words. In this sense his work is similar to that proposed by Emanuele Tesauro in *The Aristotelian Telescope* of 1665 which adopts the model of metaphor as a way to discover new relationships between data generating an infinite list of analogies and similarities unlocked by the removal of 'proper' categories; the infinite iteration of which would have provided far less reassurance to Roget.

Roget divided his concepts into six categories[xii]: 1. Abstract Relations; 2. Space; 3. Matter; 4. Intellect; 5. Volition; and 6. Affections. This system allowed readers to find words based on concepts and ideas unlocking the alphabetical abstraction[xiii] of the dictionary. The alphabetical arrangement of the dictionary tends to obscure rather than reveal the information it contains; the glossaries of Mulcaster and Cawdrey were relatively readable, but by the time of *Johnson's* the English dictionary had swelled from 8,000 to 42,773 headwords and its treasures were already inaccessible except by accident or serious study. The reference work organized by ideas restored this knowledge to the reader, but in order to be useful the taxonomy must make sense to the user. Pliny's *Natural History,* the prototype of ancient and medieval encyclopaedias, contains 20,000 facts in a chaotic list without an immediately recognizable systematic arrangement, but it is ordered according to a system that would have been understandable to a contemporary reader. Pliny maps knowledge on a hierarchy from the natural, or given, to the artificial, or created; he begins with the heavens and geography and ends with architecture and the plastic arts. Roget's categories remain intelligible and were used with the OED to construct the most recent English language reference work: The

Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary (2009), but his six-part division has been usurped by more detailed and subtle differentiations that divide language into three major categories: 1. The External World, 2. The Internal World, 3. The Social World, subdivided into a further 236,400 categories and subcategories.

Begun in Glasgow in 1965 the purpose of the HTOED was, like Roget's, to organize words based on the ideas they express, but its main purpose: "*to provide a detailed record of English vocabulary from the earliest times to the present, with sufficient accompanying information that, for any given period of the past, the user should be able to ascertain the exact state of the vocabulary (i.e. the lexical system) which existed at that time*" exceeds the purview of the ordinary thesaurus. Unlike preceding histories of English vocabulary the HTOED recognizes the primacy of meaning and uses meaning as *the* system of classification of English from 700 to the present. Roget constructed his thesaurus around his abstract categorizations of words while the HTOED started in Section 1., like Pliny, mapping out the observable phenomena of the universe with the aim of producing a *folk taxonomy* indicative of the average intelligent individual's view of the world.[xiv] Once again knowledge is subject to a particular world-view. Decisions about these classifications were often difficult precisely because where a word belongs depends on one's point of view; 'art' appears in twenty-four classes across all three major sections, but its main listing is under 'Leisure' a subcategory of 'The Social World,' rather than under 'Aesthetics' a subcategory of 'The Internal World,' or 'The Mind.' To place 'art' under 'Leisure' implies a particular understanding of its role and purpose perhaps influenced by Thorstein Veblen's opinions[xv] on the relationship between art and the leisure class amplified by the Post-Industrial origins of the museum as an institution whose purpose was to provide the masses with an edifying means of spending their newly-gained leisure time: "*there is no classification of the universe that is not arbitrary and speculative.*"

Both *Roget's* and the HTOED are characteristic of a reflexive relationship to knowledge that characterizes the modern period; despite their speculative systems of order what they offer the user is choice. In an article in *Atlantic Monthly* in 2001 Simon Winchester proclaimed that Roget's thesaurus was single-handedly responsible for the 'dumbing-down' of Western culture. Citing examples of its frequent misuse and the abuse of the knowledge it contains Winchester joins ranks with George Orwell in favour of the latter's second rule of good writing: *never use a long word when a short one will do*.

Criticism of the reference work as the custodian of knowledge predates Winchester's attack on *Roget's*. The definite article with which we qualify such works has made them the perfect vehicle by which to parody contemporary knowledge and the authority with which it is distributed. Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary*[xvi] of 1911 was inspired by entries in *Webster's Dictionary*. His entry for 'Language,' reads: '*The music with which we charm the serpents guarding another's treasure,*' 'Grammar' is '*A system of pitfalls thoughtfully prepared for the feet of the self-made man, along the path by which he advances to distinction,*' and the Dictionary is '*A malevolent literary device for cramping the growth of a language and making it hard and inelastic. This dictionary, however, is a most useful work.*' Bierce's work was roughly contemporaneous with Flaubert's *Dictionary of Received Ideas*[xvii] usually published at the end of his unfinished novel[xviii], *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, as the culmination of their unsuccessful efforts to classify and organize their world. In this dictionary 'Grammarians' are '*All pedants,*' and 'Dictionary:' '*Scoff at it – it is only for ignoramuses. Rhyming dictionary: Use one? Disgraceful!*'

Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary* of 1764, for which he was accused of undermining the foundations of civil society by the French Government, contains articles on a range of topics including essays on Joan of Arc, Envy, States and Government, Superstition, Miracles, Tears, and Marriage presented in an alphabetical, Dictionary, form. What Voltaire, Flaubert, and Bierce highlight is that *The* dictionary, *The* reference book is just that, a reference, a tool subject to use and abuse, and the Truths they contain are determined by the time of their creation and the biases of their creators. A little more than a hundred years after it had defined, catalogued, and bound all of contemporary knowledge in its twenty-eight volumes Diderot's *Encyclopédie* had been demoted to the source of parody for Flaubert's *Dictionary of Received Ideas*. Voltaire's satire was the more prescient: in the short story *Micromégas* (1752) the eponymous giant gives the French philosophers he encounters on Earth the gift of a book containing everything he knows, but when it is opened by the secretary of the Academy of Sciences on their return to Paris he discovers that it is blank. Voltaire's entry on language in the *Philosophical Dictionary*, which is immediately preceded by an article on Kissing and followed by one on Laws, begins:

> ***"There is no complete language, no language which can express all our ideas and sensations; their shades are too numerous, too imperceptible. Nobody can make known the precise degree of sensation he experiences. One is obliged, for example, to designate by the general names of "love" and "hate" a thousand loves and a thousand hates all different from each other; it is the same with our pleasures and our pains. Thus all languages are, like us, imperfect."***[xix]

Language as the imperfect vehicle of knowledge haunted by the unsayable recalls the earlier characterization as sublime. For Voltaire language is not quite yet the instrument of chaos but the imperfect instrument which fails to grasp or describe our experience of the world: the sublime in the classically Kantian sense. In literature the expression of this precarious relationship between knowledge, experience and what can be said has been called the 'topos of ineffability:' *the use of a list as a specimen or indication of an immeasurably large or unknown thing*. It is a device that spans Western literature, used since Homer, Virgil, and Dante. In Joyce it is a device that simultaneously reveals order and chaos in his detailed account of the contents of Bloom's kitchen sideboard in *Ulysses*, and the extensive list he created from the names of rivers obscured by puns and portmanteau words in *Finnegans Wake*.

> **"Upon considering both coherent excess and chaotic enumerations we realize that, compared to the lists of antiquity, something different has happened. As we have seen, Homer fell back on the list because he lacked words, tongue, and mouth, and the topos of the ineffable dominated the poetics of lists for many centuries. But, on looking at the lists drawn up by Joyce or Borges it is clear that they didn't make lists because they didn't know what to say, but because they wanted to say things out of a love of excess, hubris, and a greed for words, for the joyous (and rarely obsessive) science of the plural and the unlimited. The list becomes a way of reshuffling the world, almost putting into practice Tesauro's invitation to accumulate properties in order to bring out new relationships between distant things, and in any case to cast doubt on those accepted by common sense."**[xx]

Writers were alert to the limitations of language long before their academic counterparts the lexicographers, philologists, and philosophers of language. The use of language in this sublime, lusorious way is entirely antithetical to the seventeenth and eighteenth century views that produced the reference books that we have come to think of as the repositories of the lexicon, which reminds us that their original purpose was to help

mediate knowledge rather than celebrate language itself. Locke devotes Book III of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* to a discussion of the imperfections and abuses of words that cause miscommunication either because we fail to express ourselves clearly or because we purposefully obscure our meaning. For Locke the purpose of language is to record our thoughts and to convey ideas to others; he emphasizes language as the vehicle of knowledge and communication as the means by which we further knowledge. Unlike the systems for universal languages devised by Wilkins, Kircher, and Urquhart, Locke proposes a modest reform of his own language as the solution to these problems: the use of clear definition and where possible the illustration of what is meant. While Locke anticipates and notes how useful a comprehensive dictionary of the English language would be, his emphasis is on the responsibility of the individual to actively participate in communication: ensuring that they both understand and are understood. From this point of view the criticisms Winchester makes of *Roget's* are not the result of his work but misuse by individual users of the thesaurus.

In the chapter entitled *Exchanges Between Practical and Poetic Lists* Eco quotes two lists comparable to Borges' Chinese encyclopaedia:

> **"[…] a counter, a rigid piece of metal or wood, musical notation for a repeating pattern of musical beats, the act of preventing, a unit of pressure equal to a million dynes per square centimetre, a submerged (or partly submerged) ridge in a river, the legal profession, a stripe, and a block of a solid substance."**[xxi]

The second list reads:

> **"[…] any of various fastenings formed by looping and tying a rope (or cord) upon itself or to another rope or to another object, a hard cross-grained piece of wood, something twisted and tight and swollen, a unit of length used in navigation, a soft lump of unevenness in yarn, a sandpiper that breeds in the Arctic, and the embedding of a circle in three-dimensional Euclidean space."**[xxii]

The first list delineates the numerous meanings of 'bar,' and the second, to which we might add Wharton's '*knot of dogs*;' 'knot.' The semantic variety of these words when listed in this way is as incongruous as the categories of animals in Borges' list, Wilkins' taxonomy, or the subjects of Voltaire's essays in his *Philosophical Dictionary*. The further implication of this illustration is the relationship between meaning and use, or semantics

and pragmatics; the context in which we use either of these words conveys the precise meaning: as Wittgenstein said, *the meaning is the use*.

The interplay of freedom and restriction inherent in the relationship between meaning, use, and context means that language can both secure meaning, as Locke advocated, and leave it open to interpretation. The appropriation of language by artists and composers in the 1960's exploited this paradox. Carl Andre's *First Five Poems* (1960) isolates the words 'green,' 'five,' 'horn,' 'eye,' and 'sound' suspending them without context on separate pages. He frees these words from the syntagm and the service of the referent; each word is isolated to reveal the poetry of its own meaning. Thus 'green,' simultaneously evokes: a colour, growing, a signal that indicates safety; ripeness, or youth, something untreated or unprepared for consumption or use, or unaltered by process or time; freshness and newness, a person recently recovered from illness; immaturity or lack of development, inexperience or naivety in a person, vitality or a simpleton; public or common grassy land situated near a village or town, a ski run, a putting green or fairway in golf, Ireland, and the Irish Nationalist cause; currency, the support of environmentalism, slang for absinthe, a faction in the Roman Circus, a theorem, a mathematical function, and to desire earnestly or long for.[xxiii] All of which could only be equally valid in the non-place of language. Andre uses the term 'cut' to describe this process of removal and isolation from the lexicon; each word is presented for contemplation impeded from performing its customary function of conveying a specific meaning. This 'cutting' treats language as a kind of cultural material subject to the aesthetic processes of collage and appropriation. The reappraisal of the word as Readymade unites Duchamp's alchemical act of re-contextualisation with Humpty Dumpty's insolent claim: *'When I use a word […] it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.'*[xxiv]

Richard Serra and Vito Acconci's use of words emphasizes action rather than contemplation, whether process, appropriation, or instruction. Serra's "Verb List Compilation: Actions to Relate to Oneself" (1967 – 1968) consists of two pages of verbs listed in two columns per page; the 108 verbs enumerated describe the sculptural process emphasizing the relationship between the artist and his materials. In "0 to 9 No. 5" (1969) Acconci performs a parasitic appropriation of texts by the other contributors to a magazine; by isolating and moving their final words to the lower right corner of the page he makes them his own. Acconci's initial explorations of the confines of the page

expanded to encompass the social ramifications of language as an extension of action and interaction and formed the basis of his later performance works, as in 'Following Piece' (1969): "*Daily scheme: choosing a person at random, in the street, any location; following him wherever he goes, however long or far he travels (the activity ends when he enters a private place – his home, office, etc.).*"[xxv]

John Cage and La Monte Young's compositional instructions of the 1960's also allowed them to generate indefinite or indeterminate performances from simple, yet specific, guidelines. Cage's "0'00" (4'33" No.2)" (1962): "*In a situation provided with maximum amplification (no feedback), perform a disciplined action*" is indicative of the emphasis on action and process in Cage's work of the period. The next day he added the four qualifications to the score: *the performer should allow any interruptions of the action; the action should fulfill an obligation to others; the same action should not be used in more than one performance, and should not be the performance of a musical composition*. The score and its caveats provide clearly delineated instructions that also ensure that each and every performance will be different. Cage's use of language in this composition is just one of the ways in which he was able to create indeterminacy and concede authority to the performer; the graphic score of Variations III (1962 – 63) comprises two sheets of transparent plastic, one blank and one containing 42 identical circles, the latter of which are cut, dropped on a blank page, and interpreted via a complex list of rules; in Reunion (1968) the music heard is determined by the action of playing a game of chess. But, the use of language in 0'00" means that it can be understood and performed without any musical training. *Young's* series of fifteen instructions for musical possibilities, *Composition* (1960), includes:

> ***"Composition 1960 #5***
> ***Turn a butterfly (or any number of butterflies) loose in the performance area.***
> ***When the composition is over, be sure to allow the butterfly to fly away outside.***
> ***The composition may be any length but if an unlimited amount of time is available, the doors and windows may be opened before the butterfly is turned loose and the composition may be considered finished when the butterfly flies away.***

Composition 1960 #6

"The performers (any number) sit on the stage watching and listening to the audience in the same way the audience usually looks at and listens to performers. If in an auditorium, the performers should be seated in rows on chairs or benches; but if in a bar, for instance, the performers might have tables on stage and be drinking as is the audience.

Composition 1960 #10 to Bob Morris

Draw a straight line and follow it."

Like 0'00" these instructions blur the distinctions between the professional musician and the laymen and between audience and performer, and like Acconci's Following Piece, by using language to invite participation they situate music in the social rather than aesthetic realm; performances are the result of the mediation of the composer's intention and the performer's action. Lawrence Weiner's 'Declaration of Intent' (1968) fosters a similar relationship making the viewer, or receiver, his accomplice. In its earliest form it reads:

1. THE ARTIST MAY CONSTRUCT THE PIECE
2. THE PIECE MAY BE FABRICATED
3. THE PIECE NEED NOT BE BUILT

EACH BEING EQUAL AND CONSISTENT WITH THE INTENT OF THE ARTIST THE DECISION AS TO CONDITION RESTS WITH RECEIVER UPON THE OCCASION OF RECEIVERSHIP.

This appropriation of language as a material for music and visual art is predicated on a desire for interaction with the viewer, reader, performer, or audience; language is used to nurture dialogue. The emphasis on clarity and openness in these works allows them to operate as a form of reference, a point of departure for each iteration or interpretation. Like the lists of Joyce and Borges they do not seek to confine and limit, but to expand celebrating not the boundlessness of language but the fecund relationship between meaning and use.

My list of favourite words, phrases, sentences & paragraphs was shaped by use. As the list appears in this book each word and quotation is defined and attributed, and its place on the list is justified by anecdote or explanation. My materials are presented, unlike Andre's secluded words, with qualification. Whether the words were selected

because they convey something very specific, or because of the beauty of their form the principal order of organization of this modest list, by comparison with even the earliest English dictionaries, is use. Thus 'evil,' 'no,' and 'glamour' find a place beside 'misocapnist' and 'scacchic,' and English words are equally at home with the Greek 'tethneka,' and the Scots, 'hirple,' 'lallan,' and 'capernoited.' What, then, do I mean to convey by favourite?

Favourite can imply *a person or thing regarded with peculiar favour or preferred above others*, or *an intimate of a prince or superior*, the latter of which illustrates Humpty Dumpty's relationship to language: *The question is which is to be master – that's all.* In these definitions 'favourite' collects objects, or persons, to be treated with admiration, reverence, and respect: the lesser attributes of Burke's conception of the sublime. It is this excess of respect, reverence, and admiration that makes the dictionary and the thesaurus: *The* dictionary and *The* thesaurus. The emphasis on the definite article means that these books cease to be points of reference for use and become instead an authority preserving the lexicon untouched, except for misuse and abuse by Winchester's indolent undergraduates. To collect words as favourites in this way would be to make them the objects of contemplation. As Nietzsche said, *life requires history*, but in order to avoid being mired in contemplation of and reverence for the past history must always be in the service of action. A third meaning of 'favourite' designates a type of sentence that contains patterns common to large numbers of sentences in a language, a favourite because of the frequency of its use. The HTOED lists 'favourite' in 'The Mind' under various subcategories including 'Love,' and while it reiterates the definitions of the OED it also lists it in relation to 'friend,' 'fellow,' 'intimate,' or 'mucker.' It is in this last sense that I mean 'favourite;' these words and quotations, my materials, are friends and muckers; they are equals who never cease to surprise and astonish, and '*Astonishment, is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree*.'

Victoria Miguel

[i] Jorge Luis Borges, *The Analytical Language of John Wilkins*, Selected Non-Fictions. PP 231 - 232

[ii] Michel Foucault, Preface, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Knowledge. PP XVI - XVII

[iii] Jorge Luis Borges, *The Analytical Language of John Wilkins*, Selected Non-Fictions. P231

[iv] Umberto Eco, *The Shield and its Form*, The Infinity of Lists. P 15

[v] Foucault's periodization of Western culture: Renaissance (until 1650); Classical (1650 – 1800); Modern (1800 – contemporary).

[vi] Umberto Eco, *The Shield and its Form*, The Infinity of Lists. PP 15 – 17

[vii] Edmund Burke, Part II, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful. P 101

[viii] Ibid. P 106

[ix] OED indicates the Oxford English Dictionary, and HTOED the Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary.

[x] Quoted in Henry Hitchings, Defining the World. P 71

[xi] Wilkins' classifications also inspired the naturalist John Ray, whose work in turn provided the foundation for eighteenth century naturalists including Linnaeus and Buffon.

[xii] The division into six categories was inspired by Linnaeus' division of animals into six classes in his Systema Naturae (1735).

[xiii] He added an alphabetical index for the 1852 publication.

[xiv] Scientific data was more suitable for animals and plants.

[xv] Expressed in The Theory of the Leisure Class, (1899).

[xvi] Originally titled The Cynic's Word Book when first published in 1906.

[xvii] Also published as The Dictionary of Accepted Ideas.

[xviii] More recent editions also include the sketchy *Catalogue of Fashionable Ideas*.

[xix] Voltaire, *Languages*, Philosophical Dictionary. P 122

[xx] Umberto Eco, Chaotic Enumeration, The Infinity of Lists. PP 327

[xxi] Umberto Eco, Exchanges Between Practical and Poetic Lists, The Infinity of Lists. P 371

[xxii] Ibid. PP 371 - 374

[xxiii] From the OED

[xxiv] Lewis Carroll, *Humpty Dumpty*, Through the Looking-Glass. P 186

[xxv] Quoted in Liz Kotz, *Poetry from Object to Action*, Words to Be Looked At: Language in 1960's Art. P 170