

SENSING THE COMMON PLACE TAYLOR BRADY'S DIALECTICAL LYRIC

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*There is a simple ego in a lyric,
A strange one in war.*

— George Oppen

Anything but a 'return to the lyric' — this is the cadence itself, whose recuperative translation from hazarded address to the metalanguages of settlement has always demanded such a pre-emptive return. To parlay the phatic gamble of the lyric into the general clamor and desperation of intra-Imperial counter-communication, is to build a language that does not return.

— Taylor Brady¹

I can't leave Taylor Brady's *Yesterday's News* alone. Like all of Taylor's writing – from *Microclimates* to *Occupational Treatment* – the poems in this book wed new feeling-tones and cognition, doing the emotional and intellectual work of moving concrete thought toward new sense *the body as conductor of local and global meanings* in a world where sense is under siege. Moreover, the book's final section, "They Store It Up (slight return): notes around lines by George Oppen,"² offers a metacritical essay of lyric's current stakes, a manifesto of sorts whose sustained meditation on the consequence of lyric poetry under conditions of unending war and global disaster has been for me both a guide and a goad.

For Oppen, "lyric valuables" – the prosodic measures that make lyric consequential – emerge "from disaster," and are shot thru with historical material.³ While our situation may not look much like Oppen's, persistent social crisis still enjoins lyric to make the present legible, audible and sensible *the present, being "the one thing that has yet to be put into words"* (Robert Glück) in the interest of another future whose conditions of possibility are here, now *latencies in the present* however submerged they may be.

The lines thru which Taylor composes his "notes" come from one of Oppen's late unpublished poems, "The Poem": "I think there is no light in the world / but the world // And I think there is light." While these lines are exemplary of Oppen's dialectical lyric,⁴ I've found it useful to read Taylor's pages beside several other stanzas by Oppen, these from "Of Being Numerous" (section 26):

We want to say
'Common sense'
And cannot. We stand on

That denial
Of death that paved the cities

Generation
For generation and the pavement

Is filthy as the corridors
Of the police

[...]

Street lamps shine on the parked cars
Steadily in the clear night

It is true the great mineral silence
Vibrates, hums, a process
Completing itself

In which the windshield wipers
Of the cars are visible

The power of the mind, the
Power and weight
Of the mind which
Is not enough, it is nothing
And does nothing

Against the natural world

“We want to say / ‘Common sense’ / And cannot.” Lyric has the potential to sense what is not yet common *lyric as a haptic organ* even as our common places harden into the opposite of living feeling. But whatever we might call ‘common sense,’ Oppen suggests, is just another name for “the denial / of death that paved the cities.” So what is lyric’s vocation *what is lyric calling us to hear* when sense can’t speak the commons, or when a commons doesn’t remain to be spoken?

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As I keep saying, ‘happiness’ has to be defined realistically and empirically; not on some ‘common sense’ assumption which in practice has been continually proven untrue.

— Oppen

I’m reading Taylor’s work, and Oppen’s, beside Paolo Virno’s *A Grammar of the Multitude* and Antonio Gramsci’s “The Study of Philosophy.” Common sense – related to what Virno refers to, after Marx, as “the general intellect”⁵ – is crucial in all of these. For Gramsci, sense becomes common by way of a struggle to be historically useful *struggle to organize a public*. “Every philosophical current,” he writes, “leaves behind a sedimentation of ‘common sense;’ this is the document of its historical effectiveness” (*Prison Notebooks*, 326). Bound to sensation and cognition within whatever social ecology pressures and constrains the senses, lyric can’t exempt itself from that struggle without betraying its call *to sing common sense, as if for the first time*.

According to Gramsci’s “philosophy of praxis,” thought and action only become histori-

cally useful when they activate the syntax of a common sense. In doing so, thought and action potentialize both the reorientation of the senses *in the process of becoming their own theoreticians* and the elevation of a common sense to new levels of self-critical coherence. "A philosophy of praxis cannot but present itself at the outset in a polemical and critical guise [. . . but] it must be a criticism of 'common sense,' basing itself initially, however, on common sense" (*Prison Notebooks*, 330). Gramsci seems to be suggesting a dialectic of public forms whereby common sense contains the terms of its own critique and overcoming. Like the public intellect *all our linguistic structures and common places, exposed and vulnerable to capitalist forms always ready to expropriate them* common sense prepares the ground for opposing developments: say, state-like forms of self-preservation *terrorism* and community-based forms of care *love and grief*. I'm drawn to these formulations, and I'm turning them now toward lyric, which (Taylor reminds me) is like the common sense of poetry *lyric as poetry's default mode* whose real usefulness remains buried in the historical record.

After this consideration of common sense, Gramsci quickly turns to the self *as if anticipating my concern with lyric*: "critical understanding of self," he writes, "takes place through a struggle of political 'hegemonies' and of opposing directions [. . .] in order to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one's own conception of reality" (*Prison Notebooks*, 333). The aim is to politicize the self critically: the self as scene and effect of a politics, the production and marshalling of feeling as political activity, tone as a kind of readiness *a whole critique of lyric basing itself initially, however, on lyric*. For Gramsci, without accounting for this scene and this production *as well as these common places: antagonism, disparity, opposition* any self-reckoning *one's own conception of reality* can only be rendered as unreal. In other words, one can't bracket the self in order to treat the social material of language and sense objectively and realistically without compromising all objectivity, all realism. Insofar as the self *body and emotion fused by common sense* are penetrated by and perceptible thru that material, the social struggle of opposing directions *"the sense of self among the motor cars"* (Oppen) is always quietly at work. The attuning of feeling and cognition in relation to this struggle might then activate the contingent foundation for an emerging commons.

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While Gramsci's work finds its horizon in the struggle for hegemony where a poem might offer itself as a kind of model, Paolo Virno indirectly suggests a way of conceiving poems *a grammar* as a form of direct action. "My thesis, in extremely concise form, is this: if the publicness of the intellect does not yield to the realm of a public sphere, of a political space in which the many can tend to common affairs, then it produces terrifying effects." And a little later on he adds: "The public intellect, if it does not become a republic, a public sphere, a political community, drastically increases forms of submission" (*GM*, 40-41). Along these lines, the lyric poetry of *Yesterday's News* registers *enacts* a public intellect in the absence of a public sphere *for which it nonetheless strives* making legible *sensing, thinking, feeling* the forms of submission that attend such an absence.⁶ By yielding to the promise of a public sphere *submitting otherwise*, the poems paradoxically take leave of that absence *a kind of defection*.⁷ At the same time, the poems reactivate the common places of our public language *recharging them with being-in-common* staving off a degraded public's further degradation while agitating for the republicization of our publicness.

To hear it playing out
 all around you is to play it,
 is to die for ends without
 means the score assumes.
 Like once you'd have an income
 "settled" on you. A pause of
 centuries and the word

makes sense again, with
status indicator flipped. (YN, 27)

"We no longer face the rationalization of the State," Virno writes, "on the contrary, we must acknowledge the achieved *statization* of the intellect" (GM, 67). Virno's project addresses a situation *our own* where language and thought function as a new form of wage-labor *immaterial production of surplus-value*, which organizes *expropriates* social cooperation in the interest of capital *when what is being expropriated is the very possibility of there being a commons*. Just as production comes more and more to depend on the effective use of language *human labor becoming linguistic collaboration*, the service economy bears more and more resemblance to forms of aesthetic poiesis *language use as virtuosic labor with no actually exchangeable end product but whose value is internal to linguistic utterance*. Under these conditions, lyric, whose very materials are those of the economy itself, re-emerges with the potential to mobilize social cooperation otherwise, blocking the expropriation of public language *the separation of human beings by what unites them* not by insisting on lyric's unexchangeable opacity, nor by reducing expression to a common denominator of 'accessibility,' but by reorienting our relations to the common places of language and thought *counter-communications lurking just below the threshold of articulation*.⁸

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Poetry's politics may have a lot to do with the struggle for common sense *the social compass by which we orient ourselves when communities fail, and we are exposed to one another and the world*. With respect to lyric's usefulness, for example, the stakes may be those of the commons itself at a moment when, according to Virno, the general intellect *the common place of collective thought and cooperation* is becoming the only kind of public *however expropriated, however enclosed* in a world where there is no public sphere *only a prosthetic extension of governmental and corporate apparatuses*. For Virno, "common places" are "the most generally valid logical and linguistic forms of all our discourse:" the connection between more and less, the opposition of opposites, the relationship of reciprocity *a whole grammar of inequalities and uneven developments*. The argument continues that in today's geopolitical climate *dissolution of local communities, the anguish of not-feeling-at home* common places are more important than ever for potentializing critical action across a range of social divisions, more important than the specialized terms of this or that exclusive discourse.

No longer an intrinsic background *inconspicuous woof, the 'life of the mind'* against which rarefied figures emerge to divide and distinguish social discourses *like the segmentation of functions necessary for factory work*, the most common linguistic-cognitive faculties, Virno argues, are becoming increasingly extrinsic and shared for immaterial labor *from finance to sales* as well as for new forms of collaboration that might mobilize linguistic competence otherwise *against the interests of dominant prerogatives*. When global structures dominate normative grammars and determine what counts *migrant worker, gender-outlaw, urban poor* the common places of a general intellect "appear on the surface, like a toolbox containing things which are immediately useful" (GM, 37). The question then is how to use them beyond their hardened function *self-preservation*, how to inhabit these common places *nonsites for a non-statist public sphere*.

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The months, I mean, we measure them in sand
(cue stock footage of the aqueduct) or cue the stock
whose ups and downs acquire detail from the necessary
poverty of yours, and a greater saturation of tone.
Your face I loved when drawn in shipping routes.

Now it's always someone else becoming evident.
The square hole in the center of each video still
in a series of eighty-three is evidence of knowledge
that it's all at once. Even numbers on the keypad stick. (YN, 175)

Direction (up and down), measurement (more and less), possession (mine and yours), calculation (enumeration and series), acquisition (poverty and wealth), duration (instantaneity and interval), temporality (past and future), ontology (what is and what is becoming), identity (personal and impersonal), image (moving and still), opposition (abundance and lack), scale (finite and infinite): these are some of the common places of thought *standards of orientation* which comprise the conceptual syntax not only of this one verse, but *Yesterday's News* more generally, as the writing de-scribes "our sense of place in bio-waste" where "closer to present is farther from full" *so many common places appear condensed and under pressure in this one turn of phrase alone*. The prosody, too, turns on common tropes – homonym (juxtaposing the 'stock' that determines our grasp of the past, and the 'stock' that determines the future as a mere extension of the present), alliteration (tuning "aqueduct" to "acquire"), and substitution (from wealth to saturation) – just as critical operations turn on conventional moves. The activation of such common places stimulates the reorientation of conceptual links – directional markers thus serve as signs of accumulation and privation – making what's inconspicuous *common sense as the 'natural' connections between things* suddenly appear as prominent *a whole topography of social relations*.

What we typically call defamiliarization thus finds its social ground paradoxically by way of what's most familiar. This is how the poems displace false immediacies *feeling and affect* onto their mediating conditions *so many seemingly distant processes*. With the aura of the beloved's face emerging in shipping routes, a sentimental gaze is jolted out of accustomed location, losing its reference, not in order to achieve a generic autonomy, but rather in the interest of a living labor *love* whose commons has been entirely saturated with the obscure omnipresence of global contracts. In short, it's by way of common places *conventions* that the poems critically disassociate the terms of what passes for common sense *hegemony* a critique that lyric facilitates at the common places of sense itself.

It is a process like laundry and one wishes it would go on without much input while a cheap car burns into local color in the back yard. Balancing human smells with the weekend's waste labor holds a column of expenses well apart from what it takes simply to make it to the job next morning. I could speculate on how much detail would be killed from the balcony of a hi-rise zoned into the same coordinates but it would only plan the reproduction to a second degree. (YN, 171)

Process, balance, quantity, similitude, repetition: here again, what come to the foreground are common places *so many scenes of linguistic and conceptual exchange* where the reproduction of our labor power is relieved only by the need to imagine how one might secure something beyond that reproduction *as if a column of figures could promise a freedom independent of need*. Complementing and extending Gramsci's struggle for common sense, Virno's attention to the common places and Taylor's instigation of living labor *collective disruption of the production of private wealth* emphasize how intellectual activity *language and thought* inseparable from body and tone, can function as something other than a lubricant for reproduction, working instead to transform the place where labor *language and thought* is deadened by private interests.

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I think that poetry which is of any value is always revelatory. Not that it reveals or could reveal

Everything, but it must reveal something (I would like to say 'Something') and for the first time.

— Oppen

Returning, then, to Taylor's "(slight return)," what could it mean to activate lyric as "a daily practice, a testing over and over of the first world's evident 'success' against its failure to have articulated an opening to the future" (YN, 257). How might lyric render such a failure so that it becomes perceptible *by feeling and cognition* while nourishing that opening against the odds?

Opposites persist in and thru one another. Risking sense that is not yet common, Taylor's lyric remains faithful to the promise of an emergent commons, however imperiled that commons might be. In doing so, the writing paradoxically obeys a certain taboo on lyric – "anything but a 'return to the lyric'" – by transgressing that taboo, persisting in the writing of lyric *deforming it* as if one were writing lyric for the first time. "I think my poetry has arrived at a constricted moment where the lyric, far from returning, is finally *possible*" (YN, 258). The poetry pursues a seemingly contradictory *self-canceling* imperative to write lyric by building "a language that does not return" *a language that refuses to reproduce its own conditions of possibility, a language that will not return my voice to me*. And although "the opening made by the lyric is less than exemplary" – it may even be "compromised, clownish" (perhaps because that opening can only be unevenly developed; or, because of the motley range of negative affects it marshals *paranoia, aggression, disgust* and weak feelings *longing, shame, abjection* all of which potentially ready and tone *a commons of tuned emotions*) – "it is necessary, and it has taken this long" (YN, 258).

These propositions may startle as they cut against the grain of a certain postmodern common sense whereby lyric's ongoing possibility depends either on an ironic detachment from history and a ludic gaming with poetry's codes, or an attitude of bad faith and a feigned belief in the congruence of song's fullness and self's plenitude. At the same time, a more conservative common sense would hold that lyric remains as possible today as it's always been, indifferent to the time of history. In contrast to these bad alternatives – the one historicist (abstracting a poetic form as if it were exemplary of a past moment) and the other ahistorical (universalizing a form while disregarding the vectors of historical change) – Taylor argues for a more historically attuned approach to lyric, responding to something radically specific *contingent and unforeseen* in our present tense *the historicity of lyric valuables sounding our inaudible present*.

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Empire takes time as its own *as if time were empire's natural medium, and not a thing it produces*. Despite the myth that posits lyric's exemption from history *the lyric "I" as a special place rather than a common place* empiric time may be difficult to distinguish from lyric time. The "(slight return)" to lyric proposed by *Yesterday's News* conceives the strained temporality of lyric's present tense with conceptual rigor. Many of the book's formal tropes turn on sequential locators *common places like 'before' and 'after,' 'pre-' and 'post-'* as in the poems "Dated 'Before,'" "Post-Dated for Today," and "Dated Yesterday," whereby a temporal deictic typically used to ground a discourse in relation to some time-bound referent or historical event belies the present continuous *how yesterday's news becomes us today*, and makes the "lag" *fault* between knowledge (information) and experience (registration) illegible.⁹ This is our current *longue durée* "Dated 'Ongoing'" and the poems long to breach it to *dispatch the sovereignty of a language and a law that have simultaneously penetrated and abandoned the body*. This gets emphasized by way of the book's structural organization, which unhinges the common place of the news-bound "dateline" *reorienting the convention*

of “current events” as dates become disassociated from the content they locate without ever drifting into the arbitrary. (Often, a page with headers indicating several days, like “July 1-3,” will bleed without any beginning or end mark, onto the next, whose header will extend the dateline by several more days, “July 3-5”). Thus the journalistic trope can only fail to identify the poem’s present, even as the poem relies on that convention for its spine.

One can only deny for so long (though this may be a much longer time than we are ready to endure) complicity with a world that knows it is one’s own exact reflection, especially in those events in which one misses or averts the resemblance. Always after there is the sole remaining response, and the words must fill the space of complicit consonance so as to void it. The network’s enclosed commons of communication is most us when we think to have turned our backs, shouting ‘here, here, here’ into the unfenced void. (YN, 257)

“The network” resembles us most when we turn away from it in defiance, or when we assume an air of timeless autonomy as if time were already a common property *common place of duration and endurance*. Under empire, the future means nothing more than a projection of the present’s dominant ideas about itself, a kind of second nature, an extension of “the enclosed commons of communication” *in other words, no future at all*. What might it mean, then, for lyric song to fill the space of complicit consonance only to cancel that complicity and the silent terms of its hegemony, making that social void *no commons legible*? Along these lines, Taylor’s “slight return” asks us to imagine lyric as a kind of spell to break the spell of this submerged identity *toward which we turn as if to secure our presence “here”* between the void of public consonance without a public sphere and the unfenced void of our own expansion. The poetry performs “publicness” in a mode contrary to the deadly echo returning from both such voids *private enclosures masquerading as the commons*. And when figured as “the outside” *some non-place on the other side of “here”* such voids can only mystify a geopolitical impossibility *phantasm*.

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Laura Elrick makes a similar link between geopolitical space and lyric time in *Fantasies in Permeable Structures*:

What unfenced region? Receptacled we
vagrants of clock time fusing memory
with deceit. What fort-embattled term
or attitude, or zone . . . What pure meadow
that beckons (dusting regularity with impulse
thrown) in wild sensuous orders of
cinquefoil, paintbrush and blue. No unbarbed
region now. (XXII)

As the globe achieves the image of an “unfenced region,” everything *from real populations to imaginary signs* appears to be floating freely in an orgy of exchange, despite hardening borders and narrowing channels of circulation. This has irreversible implications for a contemporary lyric, whose own temporality *never its own* can’t escape the irreconcilable antagonism between the fettered time of wage-labor and the “free-time” of finance capital. Lyric’s material *language, emotion, body* can’t avoid this antagonism *time’s false identity, the social contradiction thru which a poem moves*. Lyric potentializes the audibility of this antagonism, even as its potential for critical judgment contends with an uncritical and narcissistic logic internal to its utterance.

Lyric may be pressured and constrained by the tension between two radically different

voids, two forms of negation and avoidance: on the one hand, the void that is our public consonance; and, on the other, a private dissonance that can only sport the mask of otherness for so long (our denial of identity between the two signaling lyric's persistent bad faith). Put differently, the first is the negation that is already our unlivable world *the active non-existence of the world we've failed to make* where dead labor and unfreedom prepare for an already negated future. This void always haunts, especially when lyric abandons the scene of enclosed communication *this deafening silence* as if by turning its back poetry might incline toward the semblance of something more truthful *say, the lure of a purer expression, or just a more authentic scream.*

But the promise of the second void "*What unfenced region?, nature, the infinite, or "outside"* is only a product of the first and more familiar void, and a fantasy nourished by enclosure itself. Lyric's turn toward the "unbarbed" only dissimulates the void of its own "complicit consonance," disavowing its own aversion and avoidance. Out of this other void, our own language returns to locate us thru the noise of some grave hush *singing "here, here, here."* This is lyric as the ongoing collaborative project of Echo and Narcissus, which, like the dominant social technology of communication in disguise, refuses to communicate anything but itself *and therefore refuses to communicate.*

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But Taylor seems to be pointing toward a radically different kind of negation *form of "defection"*:

Lyric, because its fundamental is address to a world from a place within the world, and because neither of these can be known or given in advance. Without some authorizing cadence the clashing overtones cannot resolve, and an angular space of blank incision opens us. (YN, 257)

This is the unauthorized "blank" *a common place within the world* that exposes us as we collide with that prior void of deadly consonance. From this blank *unguaranteed nonsite, ungraphed atopia* lyric might address us in a language that can neither echo nor resemble, a language that does not return to affirm our being here *when "here" has lost its own location.* This blank holds the still smoldering promise of real futurity, otherwise canceled or avoided by the world as it is, the very thing that has to be risked if there is to be anything at all that's not already present. This is the blank where living labor *hope of making an other future* will not have been entirely engulfed by the dead time of empire that continues to locate us thru "a burgeoning human cargo of dead labor" *the ongoing piling up of bodies which both are and are not our own* where our potential to make another world remains in suspension.

The site of this possibility *to locate a space when there is no space, "the vacuole or gap [. . .] in which others might remain alive"* can be likened to the beloved, and to risk its promise is to risk "the possibility that the beloved will not answer, is dead or absent" (YN, 258-9). This, too, is a possibility interior to lyric address, "the possibility that the poem takes place where space has vanished." If modern lyric imagines itself to be singing freely in space *unfenced and unzoned* or in the open faults and fissures between fences and zones, how can we locate lyric's place when these interstices have all but closed? This is the critical risk, for "here" lyric becomes "the recognition that one might not speak at all" *communication's impossibility.* How are we to understand *this* silence and how might we activate it so that it doesn't merely echo the deafening silence that is already the world's? It may be that lyric *as possibility* stands and falls on this question.

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For Oppen, one of the critical questions posed by lyric poetry is the question of bad faith: the problem of the poet using the poem to console some fundamental disbelief, while doubting the poem's ability to do or say anything other than what the world is already saying and doing in its "great mineral silence." Taylor's lyric turns on an awareness that good conscience is out of the question. "Blank refusal was an option, and we continue in all our past tenses to have tried and tested it, each time as if it were the first and wholly unanticipated. My poems are as rotten with this bad faith as anyone's" (YN, 256). But this "bad faith" isn't the bad faith of good conscience. Rather, it's the residual bad faith that clings to lyric like a lingering temptation to abandon the world to either of the two voids: a temptation whose persistence as "option" *although it's not one* haunts lyric from within.

So lyric tends to go on *by default* flirting with the familiar tension between hermetic and orphic alternatives – silence or non-communication, on the one hand, and expressive fullness, on the other – as if the only alternatives to these alternatives were irony and distance, reproducing the terms of language-commodification that make the world unlivable. But the world's autopoiesis *the world as a vast display of commodities* has itself generated the latter lyric valuables "from disaster," the same disaster, for that matter, that underwrites production's autonomy *capital's abandonment of human agency*. Lyric's only real alternative, then, if it is to rise self-critically and sound the tones of its own reality *never one's own* is to risk that "blank of incision," a figure for a kind of cut and an opening into and out of the fatal material from which our selves and our sense *our bodies and the world* are similarly composed.

"I think it is necessary to risk an inability to speak if I am to find whether anything can still be said" (YN, 258). Taylor's recognition of the "phatic gamble" *risk of uttering sounds as if they belonged to a shared vocabulary and conformed to a common syntax* is that, in this grammar of voids, there are also two blanks – the "blank refusal" reflecting the two mirroring voids while relocating us in the world as it is, and "the blank of incision" *exit or defection* promising the renewed possibilities of living labor – and they can't be distinguished in advance. Wired to opposing forces, these blanks describe irreconcilable readings of the book's title, *Yesterday's News* – as a figure conceding the temporality of our ongoing social disaster, and as a figure for a radical leave taking *defection* or break within that temporality – antagonistic figures and forces that may actually persist in and thru one another *this undecideability being what scares me about writing lyric poems today, and maybe that's why I write them*. If all that returns to us when we speak is our own distorted image coming back at us from the plenitude of a void, then lyric's parlay must be something other than that emphatic "here, here, here" where our echo returns to us alone. Lyric must rather construct "a language that does not return" out of the only materials at hand *all this "accumulated dead matter"*. There's no way out of the problem except back into it, no "blank refusal" to recognize the world and one's place in it, and no denying that we must find a way to address one another *while simultaneously addressing something that is not here* from within it.

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Still, the threat of "silence" persists *possibility that nothing can be said*. This may be what Oppen means by the "great mineral silence" of our "natural world" *second nature, completely enclosed by all our planning and calculation*. But whereas for Oppen that fatality converged with the threat of nuclear annihilation – a threat that haunts his entire middle period – for us, that impenetrable "mineral fact" coincides with the self-evidence of empire, whose transparent appearance *common sense* has become an opacity of unprecedented density. Perhaps this is what one cannot speak *the great mineral silence of our natural world being the pure noise of the totally commodified globe* and yet it's precisely this about which one cannot

refuse to speak without unwittingly echoing this very thing.

There may be a positive form of "exit" *defection from all our false alternatives* that Taylor's lyric proposes, something other than the flight of bad faith (good conscience), something other than abandon. This would be a form of unauthorized disobedience which aims beyond what Paolo Virno refers to as "the gloomy dialectic between acquiescence and transgression." As for the common places, his lyric moves from a servile virtuosity *language as primary lubricant of post-Fordist capitalism* to a re-publican virtuosity *language as eminent public resource of living labor* stimulating the place of political community, anticipating a sphere of common affairs no longer dominated by corporatist state interests. By modifying the common places of struggle *de-scribing and altering the common sense that underwrites the rules of the game* the poems perform a defection that "hinges on a latent kind of wealth, an exuberance of possibilities." Again, for Virno, "What's at stake [is] the surplus of knowledge, communication, virtuosic acting in concert, all presupposed by the publicness of the *general intellect*" (GM, 70-1). This disobedience alludes to what the public intellect could activate without retreating to either public or private voids.

In *Yesterday's News*, lyric aims to encounter that silent noise *deadly common sense of production for production's sake* while locating some opening into and out of the enclosed commons of sanctioned communication, which has naturalized its own refusal to communicate and turned that refusal into complicit consonance. Taylor's writing does this not by cataloguing the language fragments of an eroded public sphere, nor by sampling the residues of subjectivity that cling to its surfaces, but by charging that material with the weak force of address to an emergent public *who will have been here to hear this?* as if to a lover who may well be absent, or to a world that hasn't yet arrived.

Along lyric's frontier, Taylor's song persists in and thru this clamoring silence, and I learn to listen so that my body and mind might hear the tone of *and be toned by* the present that will have been here.

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"March 21, 2003":

Beneath nothing but sky

as the anchoring invention of zero
but downscale in explosive tons

we'll arrive at ten

chained in pairs
or rainfall from inside us

spotted by the optic nerve
life in weeping pores
for shelter from the shade

where light fails to reflect what
there we'll build

(YN, 69)

NOTES:

¹ *Yesterday's News*, 257, hereafter cited as YN.

² The title references Jimi Hendrix's "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)," a track that amplifies and sustains so many of the features associated with Hendrix's musicianship. (Thanks for drawing my attention to that one, Taylor!)

³ "Ultimately the air / Is bare sunlight where must be found / The lyric valuables. From disaster // Shipwreck [...]" "From Disaster," *New Collected Poems*, 50.

⁴ As I was editing this piece for *ON*, I came upon Oppen's emphatic disavowal – "NOT A DIALECTIC BUT VISION" – much to my astonishment, in the recently published *Selected Prose, Daybooks, and Papers* (126), and there's a lot I'd like to say about this statement, but I can't do that here.

⁵ Virno occasionally refers to "public intellect" interchangeably with Marx's concept of *general intellect*. "With the term *general intellect* Marx indicates the stage in which certain realities (for instance, a coin) no longer have the value and validity of a thought, but rather it is our thoughts, as such, that immediately acquire the value of material facts. If in the case of abstract thought it is the empirical fact (for example, the exchange of equivalencies) which exhibits the sophisticated structure of pure thought, in the case of *general intellect* the relation is overturned: now it is our thoughts which present themselves with the weight and incidence typical of facts. [...] The *general intellect* manifests itself today, above all, as the communication, abstraction, self-reflection of living subjects" (*Grammar of the Multitude*, 64-5, hereafter cited as GM). Virno's use of this concept emerges with his reading of a curious passage in Marx's *Grundrisse*, a fragment bearing the heading "Contradiction between the foundation of bourgeois production (value as measure) and its development. Machines etc." Here, Marx theorizes a situation wherein "labour no longer appears so much to be included within the production process; rather, the human being comes to relate more as watchman and regulator to the production process itself." He's describing an emergent dislocation of emphasis and import within the agency of production, a shift from labor time as the measure of value to accumulated "general social knowledge," whose surplus, like wealth itself, becomes a direct force of production (*Grundrisse*, 704-5). For Virno, however, "the 'general intellect' comprises formal and informal knowledge, imagination, ethical inclinations, mentalities and 'language-games.'" In a short article entitled "General Intellect," he goes on to write, "In contemporary labour-processes there are thoughts and discourses that function as productive 'machines' in their own right, not needing to take on a mechanical body or even an electronic soul." ("General Intellect," 5-6).

⁶ As Jules Boykoff and Kaia Sand note in the opening pages of their recent book, *Landscapes of Dissent*, "neoliberalism's unquenchable penchant for growth devours public space in the name of profit maximization. Through regulation, privatization, commercialization and consumption that, like water, searches out the cracks and crevices in public space." Touching on the idea of common sense, they go on to refer to David Harvey, while remarking how neoliberalism "has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in and understand the world" (*Landscapes of Dissent*, 6). While not synonymous with public space, the public sphere has similarly eroded under neoliberalism *if it was ever there to begin with*.

⁷ This idea of *yielding* touches on a concept I've been working out, something I'm calling "patience," which is agency's inversion and complement. Patience is anything but a form of docile passivity. Rather, unlike the overvalued social agent whose aims and intentions are determined in advance by codified coordinates of possibility, the patient's receptivity moves one to do what can't be done within any given field of pre-coded possibles.

⁸ Unlike "resistance," this blocking runs along the lines of what Virno refers to as a kind of "defection" from the current relations of production: not a passive refusal, but rather a form of "exit" *the real social power of our impotence* that promises to reorient our relation to all the common places (GM, 70).

⁹ “Yet the *raison d’être* for *Yesterday’s News*, as its title indicates, is the ‘lag’ of knowledge vis-a-vis ‘experience,’ how epistemologies fall again and again on the swords of ontology (itself a problematic term). [...] Hence the book seems to say, at certain points, that it must give in to certain forms of submission in order to (re)activate other forms of commission – I’d say this is precisely a definition of public language.” Tyrone Williams, personal correspondence.

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