What are Experts For?

A. Staley Groves

In this issue we include contributions from the individuals presiding at the panel All in a Jumal’s Work: A BABEL Wayzgoose, convened at the second Biennial Meeting of the BABEL Working Group. Sadly, the contributions of Daniel Remein, chief rogue at the Organism for Poetic Research as well as editor at Whiskey & Fox, were not able to appear in this version of the proceedings.

From the program:

2nd Biennial Meeting of the BABEL Working Group Conference
“cruising in the ruins: the question of disciplinarity in the post/medieval university”
September 21st, 2012: Session 13
McLeod C.322, Curry Student Center
Northeastern University, Boston, MA.

Traditionally, a wayzgoose was a celebration at the end of a printer’s year, a night off in the late fall before the work began of printing by candlelight. According to the OED, the Master Printer would make for the journeymen “a good Feast, and not only entertains them at his own House, but besides, gives them Money to spend at the Ale-house or Tavern at Night.” Following in this line, continent. proposes in its publication(s) a night out and a good Feast, away from the noxious fumes of the Academy and into a night of revelry which begins, but does not end, at the alehouse or Tavern. continent. proposes that the thinking of the Academy be freed to be thought elsewhere, in the alleys and doorways of the village and cities, encountered not in the strictly defined spaces of the classroom and blackboard (now white) but anticipated and found where thinking occurs.
Historically, academic journals have served a different purpose than the Academy itself. Journals (from the Anglo-Fr. jurnal, “a day,” from O.Fr. jomel, “day, time; day’s work,” hence the journalist as writer of the news of the day) have served as privileged sites for the articulation and concretization of specific modes of knowledge and control (insemination of those ideas has been formalized in the classroom, in seminar). In contrast, the academic journal is post-partum and has been an old-boys club, an insider trading network in which truths are (re)circulated against themselves, forming a Maginot Line against whatever is new, or the distinctly challenging. All in a Jurnal’s Work will discuss (in part) the ramifications of cheap start-up publications that are challenging the traditional ensconced-in-ivory academic journals and their supporting infrastructures. The panel will be seeking a questioning (as a challenging) towards the discipline of knowledge production/fabrication (of truth[s]) and the event of the Academy (and its publications) as it has evolved and continues to (d)evolve. Issues to be discussed will revolve around the power of academic publishing and its origins, hierarchical versus horizontal academic modules (is there a place for the General Assembly in academia?) and the evolving idea of the Multiversity as a site(s) of a (BABELing) multivocality in the wake of the University of Disaster.

“What are experts for?” Taking cues from my mentors I simply modified the phrase “what are poets for?” Judith Balso’s challenge to the motive of the philosophical “expert” falls on the use of poets in philosophical systems. In this case Hölderlin “imprisoned” for the convenience of Heidegger’s paternal legacy.1 Given another mentor takes a different path, I hesitate to exploit this further. Yet thinking this expert/nonexpert limus is clearly a matter of privilege. And privilege has much to do with the University of Disaster, what I see at stake in our proper name game: Para-Academia and its possible publishing franchise.

To set the stage I call in Wallace Stevens on the view of being. Namely “official” or “unofficial” views some may be familiar with. Stevens begins the second chapter of his well known prose The Necessary Angel as follows: “It appears that what is central to philosophy is its least valuable part.” Stevens recalls correspondence between Henry Bradley and Robert Bridges; quoting Bradley:

My own attitude toward all philosophies old and new, is very sceptical [...] I feel that the universe of being is too vast to be comprehended [...] We do get [...] glimpses of the real problems, perhaps even real solutions; but when we have formulated our questions, I fear we have always substituted illusory problems for the real ones.2


One might call for a counteroffensive. A new self-assumed, official view. Speculative philosophers today may brand the poetic call as correlationist hindcasting. Indeed we live in a time of great illusions, one must watch their back. From my view the speculative project is driven by an asymmetrical dominance of grapheme over phoneme. Left alone we only repeat this expert game. Its extreme realization is the dispensation of the “fact of language.” A posture of being-right enacts “the reasoning of the religious,” a Larillian, heretical triumph. Poetry however is not religion, literature, or philosophy. Stevens addressed “expressions” or skeptical attitudes forthright:

If these expressions speak for any considerable number of people and [...] if any considerable number of people feel this way about the truth and about what may be called the official view of being (since philosophic truth may be said to be the official view), we cannot expect much in respect to poetry, assuming we define poetry as an unofficial view of being.3

Poetics is put to use for the father of thought, philosophy. Yet poetics retains an undetected supremacy, continues Stevens on poetic authority, “This a much larger definition of poetry than it is usual to make [...] the nature of the truth changes, perhaps for no more significant reason than that philosophers live and die, so the nature of poetry changes, perhaps for no more significant reason than that poets come and go.”4 Poets come and go. Philosophers die. Dedication to “the reason” is a matter of paternal legacy. Therefore as supposition the source for “the reason” dovetails with “writing is a cut at origin.” Failure to penetrate poetic origination results in despair and destruction of philosophical expertise.

Stevens’s maneuver between poetry and philosophy lays groundwork for the non-expert. Challenges para-academia faces are similarly “imagination” and “the reason” as a work for “truth.”5 A similar expert fate was expressed by Jean-Luc Nancy, that the automation of metaphysics through the Enlightenment meant philosophy was reduced to technological sense.6 Nancy’s “techno-logy” means the capture and presentation of nature as “metaphysical technology.”7 An authoritarian crisis indeed. Christopher Fynsk noted a hyper-disciplinarianism accelerated by the defunding and dismantling of the Humanities. Thus Stevens’s poetic change and possibility insubordinate to “the reason.” A sentiment Fynsk iterates criticizing the rise of corporatized University banishing relation between disciplines by imperial demands: publishing empty gestures by empty experts for proof of intellectual emptiness. This instrumental achievement, “the reason” displaces imagination toward functionary mental anemia.8 Here a pirouette to the original theme: para-academia and a publishing franchise. What are experts for? To re-en-franchise the non- or in stride with capitalism’s bottom line? What are we pub-

3. Ibid., 67.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 68.
6. What I call the difference of the calling as ab-sense, or ad-sense: the problematic of axiomatic sentencing.
lishing, for whom, for what? Following the speculative movement seems ideologically burdened toward an anti-humanism, akin to school-shooting revelation. Regarding a larger definition of poetry, the task of the non- may be found in Stevens:

It seems elementary [...] that the poet, in order to fulfill himself, must accomplish a poetry that satisfies both the reason and the imagination. It does not follow that in the long run the poet will find himself in the position in which the philosopher now finds himself. On the contrary, if the end of the philosopher is despair, the end of the poet is fulfillment, since the poet finds a sanction for life in poetry that satisfies the imagination. Thus, poetry, which we have been thinking of as at least the equal of philosophy, may be its superior [...] The look of it may change a little if we consider not that the definition has not yet been found but that there is none.9

There is none, was not; wont be. Stevens curiously intuits a reply to this “Platonism” dispute of the day, noting “as extraordinary [was] the language of Plato” both Plato and Aristotle had not a Greek word for literature. Literature too grasps at poetry as an instrument of “the reason.” If philosophy is literature you may grasp my point regarding expertise, for surely if philosophy is not literature then poetics have been found in reading thus thinking it.10 It is this engagement that concerns me most, that para-academes ditch relation for the sake of necessary commerce and putative trendiness. In turn a poetics without practice.

In Stevens’s name I am revoking poetic licenses, specifically to affirm poetic authority. And that’s not necessarily good news. Yet the lack of definition was the point; remains the pointlessness of the best anti-philosophies of the postwar era. If “the reason” has arrived effectively displacing the human this illusory ground between “great persons” and the Flusserian, cybernetic “functionary” is upon us.11 What else explains the faith-based merits of anti-humanism if not technological salvation? Impressing the authoritarian father of philosophy to what end? Indeed, one should counter Enlightenment values and its electro-mechanical governmentality. Clearly in an age of “terror,” “best practices” remain to be seen. How we imagine a new praxis, order, and organization is a matter of answering a call, a matter of vocation.

We could consider compensation if to ward-off a supplementary mask otherwise donned. I speak about a lack of capital valorization. The real despair of philosophy is the ruination of the teaching profession. The majority para-academes ride this rift between expert and the non-, excluded from our privileged debates by pressures of intellectual disciplinarism and aca-nemia. As prostheses of an ethereal institution, mere activity allocating capital to human-students: all amass debt, migrating between electromechanical and

10. ibid., 69.
digital States, between imagination and “the reason.”

To be clear the dignity of engagement diminishes daily; what otherwise professionalizes experts forged in pathological career despair. This cuts across our worthless politics whose media engines are metaphysical dynamos; all these social movements filling my virtual junk mail. I speak about subjectification between States, analogical and digital. I speak about the rapid depletion of the resource of language requisite to community. I speak personally about my crisis with authority; against a compensatory prostheses, not to be confused as speculative “necessity.” Life as a para-professor adjunct is called, after all “contingent faculty.” Rethinking contingency means to engage authoritarian despair with poetic affirmation, to dominate the arrogance of “the reason”—this mask of institutional allegiance concealing a new form of production we witness and give testimony to. This dispensation congealing into a new body of thought.

Could it be answered by Stevens, this authority, by his insistence of emotional and imaginative “security?” Perhaps, given we are “bound to consider a language” that had “no word for literature.” Returning to Stevens we may understand problems of such egoism. If language is a “singly” type, as he notes, a “mediation” of imagination calling in father Hegel; it is a poetics fused with “the reason.” Yet are we to confuse poetic superiority with Stevens’s “idea of God?” No, that is my academic point, certainly not. Poets appear, they come and go as the call itself: impossible possibility follows.

Stevens illustrates another possibility. The poetic mind as the center of labor. Conversely automation introduces poetics to the “ideas of order” to the ordinary, but first as ordinance, that eventually ordinances itself Augustan. Clearly the “exponential” production of graphene meant a new “individuality” intuiting contemporary “immaterial” or “affect labor.” Does Stevens’s poet-manager work this name game, for a contract with reason many seem willing to “occupy?” No. This is yet a spectral game. And I have often felt the paralysis of that day in every other. Nonetheless the emergency of the online classroom, and “hybrid” “face-to-face” varieties loom. All remaining relation to be graphically defined. Posturing as philosophers behind the letters PhD we only forward the reason. Conversely if we follow our poet we become a threat all too sudden, writes Stevens:

in spite of an absence of a definition and in spite of the impressions and approximations we are never at a loss to recognize poetry [...] in the absence of a definition all the variations of the definition are peripheral [...] we think that a psychology of a poet has found its way to the center [...] if the philosopher

12. I am referencing “Imagination as Value” from The Necessary Angel, where Stevens discusses imagination as security from political programs, it comes from the unreal thus the thinking of pathology in its exhibition.
13. It seems Avital Ronell addresses this forthright in Loser Sons.
14. Stevens, 68.
15. I am referencing Stevens’s comments about “Ideas of Order at Key West,” circa 1937, specifically about this “new individually.”
16. See Jacques Derrida, Specters of Marx, viz. “Apparition of the Inapparent,” specifically his differentiation between spirit and soul, the dominant and dominated.
comes to nothing it is because he fails […] the poet comes to nothing because he succeeds. The philosopher fails to discover.¹⁷

If reality were solely our poet’s call, the poet could, writes Stevens “destroy us” supposing “the poet discovered and had the power […] at will and by intelligence to reconstruct us by […] transformations.” A problematic of ordinance. When the “double call” comes and goes. Mass killings as sudden contingent revelation and absence of a second, self-inflicted gunshot reply: Jared Loughner’s grammatical infatuation becomes direct-action-packed political assassination; James Holmes aka Joker as vanguard of the hyperreal state of mind; Breivik’s slaughter about pointless right-nostalgia. A triumph of “the reasoned” will, or the incompetence of handling poetic ordinance? A divine psychosis, or a returning phoneme counterattacking graphical repression? The problematics of authority means I call Avital Ronell’s “loser sons” to the stand. I ask about this graphic authorization of the call. A paternalization of imagination, the religious, indeed divisionary, duplicity of the call that comes and goes. Where do we go from here? Mr. Holmes is staring off into space, he’s looking through the judge.

The insubordinate “oxymoronic” truth of “exposed existence” is a poetic moment. A metabolic appetite consuming our imaginative input destined as shallow “exponential” distributions, exhibited imagination, cultic bravado. Who then do we call hero, authority? Responds Stevens, “[I]f we believed that there was, a center, it would be absurd to fear or avoid its discovery.” Technology exposes the insubstantial “vital node” Stevens continues:

The mind of the poet describes itself as constantly in his poems […] something a good deal more comprehensive than the temperament of the artist [….] We are concerned with the whole personality and, in effect, we are saying that the poet who writes the heroic poem that will satisfy all there is of us, and all of us in time to come, will accomplish it by the power of his reason, the force of his imagination and, in addition, the effortless and inescapable process of his own individuality.¹⁸

The age of self-sufficient, neoliberal go-a–loners is here. We’re among the endless blossoms chasing aural specters, what Walter Benjamin called the inescapable “conditions of capitalism.” Yet as we will never become Gods, for whom or what do we serve? What are experts for? Partial-extinction, techno-pathologies, or imaginative timing this technological age?

¹⁷. Stevens, 70.
¹⁸. Stevens, 70-71.