



IMAGINATIONS:
JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES |
REVUE D'ÉTUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE
L'IMAGE

Publication details, including open access policy
and instructions for contributors:

<https://imaginationsjournal.ca>

A Research-Creation Episteme? Practices, Interventions, Dissensus Editors: Agata Mergler, Joshua Synenko

Image credit: Mergler, Agata. "Flowers no 6", wet
cyanotype contact print and digital rendering.
Poznań, 2022.

To cite this article:

Principe, Concetta. "Vortex: Derrida, Lacan, Life." *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies* vol. 15, no. 3, 2024, pp. 321-327, doi: <https://doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE29719>.

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE29719>



The copyright for each article belongs to the author and has been published in this journal under a **Creative Commons 4.0 International Attribution NonCommercial NoDerivatives** license that allows others to share for non-commercial purposes the work with an acknowledgement of the work's authorship and initial publication in this journal. The content of this article represents the author's original work and any third-party content, either image or text, has been included under the Fair Dealing exception in the Canadian Copyright Act, or the author has provided the required publication permissions. Certain works referenced herein may be separately licensed, or the author has exercised their right to fair dealing under the Canadian Copyright Act.

VORTEXT: DERRIDA, LACAN, LIFE

CONCETTA PRINCIPE

This research creation project is a poetic rendering of a portion of the story of getting my PhD. The relationship between the text and vortex of theory (Derridean, Lacanian among others) and the quotidian, generate this “vortex” of prose poems. Inspiring the research are neighbours, dinner menus, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the news, Betty (Davis, Crocker, Goodwin, Boop), Homer, Dante, the Inquisition, my dissertation defence; Derrida’s essay on *différance*, his ideas on the universal and autobiography, and his texts *Archive Fever* and *Acts of Religion*; and Lacan’s reflections on lack, the absence of the universal woman (*Seminar XX*), and the *objet a* and *Das Ding* (*Seminar XI*). Thus the poetry of scholarship.

Le présent projet de recherche création est une interprétation poétique d’une partie de l’histoire de l’obtention de mon doctorat. La relation entre le texte et le tourbillon de la théorie (derridienne, lacanienne entre autres) et le quotidien, génère ce « vortex » de poèmes en prose. Des voisins, des menus de dîner, *Sire Gauvain et le Chevalier vert*, les nouvelles, Betty (Davis, Crocker, Goodwin, Boop), Homère, Dante, l’Inquisition, ma soutenance de thèse; l’essai de Derrida sur la *différance*, ses idées sur l’universel et l’autobiographie, et ses textes *Mal d’Archive* et *Foi et savoir*, ainsi que les réflexions de Lacan sur le manque, l’absence de la femme universelle (*séminaire XX*), et l’*objet a* et *Das Ding* (*séminaire XI*) inspirent la recherche. Ainsi, la poésie du savoir.

A SHORT PREAMBLE

In my lyric memoir titled *Discipline N.V.*, published with Palimpsest Press in 2023, I tell the story of getting my PhD while handicapped by a number of things, including being perimenopausal and suffering from anxiety and depression. Added to that, I was struggling to grasp the complexity (simplicity?) of theory while staying on top of the demands of being a mother; to put it another way, I was considering the relevance of theory to life. How does understanding ontology feed my child? The disjunction between theory and life (or praxis) is expressed in the poems of the book using literary strategies such as the fragment, non-sequiturs, metaphors, and alliteration. In essence, the book is a research creation project involving the poetic intervention of scholarship. “Vortext,” using the same stylistic strategies, continues that project.

The intellectual schools of thought that I am drawing from in this long poem are deconstructionism and psychoanalysis. Since poetry is a project of language, the Derridean *différance* is a gold mine for my work: meaning is expressed in the chain of connotations, embracing deferral of meaning and repetition. In other words, I build metaphors that problematize what scholarship thinks it can accomplish. Moreover, I embrace Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction of universalism in favouring the particular: i.e., if human rights are universal, why doesn’t everyone benefit from the same human rights? I join Derridean principles with the Lacanian idea of the subject’s search for the truth of her desire. In Jacques Lacan’s terms, the truth is always partial or achieved only on the path of lies. Thus, desire traces deception which circles the lack at the centre of the subject, the hole of being that is never filled/fulfilled. The two discourses combined with the text of daily life are the “textual modes” that come together as a vortex, which is why I am naming this “Vortext.” You could say that this synergy has at its heart the “search” in research creation.

This project is an intervention in the academy in that it unbinds the hierarchy of scholarship over artistic creation: who says that poetry can’t be a viable kind of scholarship? For that matter, who says scholarship needs to be in the “essay” form? So I am “essaying” in the spir-

it of Michel de Montaigne's experiment with personal reflections by experimenting with genres to tell the story about being a PhD candidate. The text destabilizes the borders that distinguish scholarship from poetry by joining them so tightly that meaning is achieved only in a liminal state, and even then, it is ambiguous. I mean, in scholarly terms, that the thesis evades the text. In concert with this evasion is a test of scholarship as creative practice. If literary research gets its definition and authority from using poetic text for analysis, this poem inverts that hierarchy by making poetry the vulture of research. I literally use my dissertation experience for metaphor. Terms such as Logos, Symptom, Messianism, and Homer promise an intellectual discourse, but the poems defy that expectation by breaking down any argument with intrusive inner thoughts, anxiety, or life events such as a neighbour being arrested, someone hurting their foot, or a dinner in need of preparation. Put in literary gothic terms, this poetry is created of theory and may be considered its monster.

Inspiring the search in the pages ahead are neighbours, dinner menus, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the news, Betty (Davis, Crocker, Goodwin, Boop), Homer, Dante, the Inquisition, my dissertation defence; Derrida's essay on *différance*, his ideas on the universal and autobiography, and his texts *Archive Fever* and *Acts of Religion*; and Lacan's reflections on lack, the absence of the universal woman (*Seminar XX*), and the *objet a* and *Das Ding* (*Seminar XI*). Thus the poetry of scholarship.

LOGOS

Faith. In the fast lane of an auto-da-fé. What do you believe in? Derrida on faith, circling his circumcision. Faith in the word as your word "rack." A first letter of the self. The "a" of the article of faith. The faith that there was an aleph. Fasten your seat belts, the judges are ruthless. Fasten your bones to the rack. Faster than that. Faith is a man-made object. Sort of like a wheel or a word. The word is *fides*. It is your world that circles the oral sun. Confide in him; fidelity is my game; trust me, the flames won't hurt you.

FEVER

Difference. *Différance*. Where there's smoke defer to the magistrate. Fair and feral. Bus fare and tame as the whip cream on your blond cake. Beat me with your deferrals and I'll raise you a pancake. I cannot. I am supposed to defer to courtly justice. Why? The dialectic of difference. Never got it. The negative theology. Never respected the difference of this butter from your toast. Eat my crumbs. Archain. Arche. Archon, Arghh. Don't waste your time, says the big ego who liked to know it all. How about that universal, eh?

HOLE

Universal time. Universal veil. Lacan likes me in my Salome dress. Fail. There is no woman nor is this a vale of universal tears filling academia with flowers and singularity. Uni-versifying the streams of intellectual practice. Ridge and rote. Bridge the universe. Moten and versatility. Diversity. Versus. Verse is another word for poesy. *Poiein*, to create. Universalistic is unrealistic. *Vert* as, in the French, green. Verily, I will *différance* the Green Knight. Oh no, Sir Gawain again. Or not. Reversing the irreversible. Vertices. Universals. Inversing the difference. University, if you can stomach it. Come full circle and bend the vorticular subject with teleological mandates: the totality. Not catholic necessarily. Verily. Versus the way that Betty circled winter on the lake last summer. Protons so thick. So very.

MÖBIUS STRIP

The atom. Adam is a spinning thing in western history. What is it? The lake is round and scansion that. Circle "mi, do" or don't. A circular argument, the article of singularity declines in multiple dances on Monday nights with green-as-they-come candidates. On a summer night, the neighbour sings low and soulful at the very hour when only one person has a window opened at such a crack that the music fills the room with listening to mom hum when she hung the clothes on the line. A clothesline circles the backyard. A coniferous argument renders the laundry dry so it is fine to sit down and watch eter-

nity get away with it. Fit that into a square hole, I dare you. Spin this on the vorticose wedge. Talk about walking the deferral to the corner. Circle back and nail Paul's circumcision as a flesh fetish. There is no right turn in defense mechanisms. Right this way.

SYMPTOM

Rights. Right away. He built the garage on the right of way. The universal subject has no rights. The subject of human rights. The right way. Give him these cans of salmon and don't tell him who sent them, said the father. Doing the right thing. A gift of canned fish for the neighbour. Salmon swimming the wrong way. The garage is listing right and the landlord doesn't care if his tenants get sick. Human rights, eh? The law is clear, and the police can enter if they deem it is unsafe. Who has the right to tell me what I can do? Right of return. Right turn. Right along the border, he cut the bushes for you. After all was said and done, the turn was linguistic and Moses was lifted. Left. Left or right. He needed a break. Right of the lane. She broke winter inside herself then touched her ear, sprained her left foot. Antithesis.

MESSIANISM

Dialectical anxiety. Dialect. Deferred. Vernacular on the streets, diurnal. Deferral. Dial the number and don't expect short ribs. First Hegel and then dialysis. No, the thesis must have white blood cells. Where is your diagnosis coming from? The delicate tongue of the ancient mariner. The delectable structure of this and that; here and there; now and never again. Dis and dat, jokes the good neighbour. *Das Ding*. Is and is not. As Parmenides said: What is, is and what is not, cannot be; but if it can be thought, even if it is not, it is. The dialogue. Logo. Ego. Lesbos. Vamos. Leggo my eggo. Ergo, I am what I am and am no doubt.

DAS DING

Am. Amber. Ambulance. Perambulate. Periodontist. Ach, it aches. A as the article; a as the object; A as the aleph; ach, my foot hurts. Podiatrist in the archive. Arachnid. Anterior thoughts of the future moon in Scorpio; antipathy and postmodern indifference; auntie, why are you late again, we have missed you? Ant hills and anemones; art and ass; assuage the apple of my eye; aster, and an apple again, ambling down the asphalt. Artichoke salad. Betty, go catch her before she salads the speech again.

HOMER

Ain't too big a hole. Hole in the wall, glory or fury. Cavities fill the camera aperture, a mouth that eats the fish, whole. The holy see full of incense. Holy smokes, I can't breathe. Fire in the hole. Fire in the hole. They repeat that because when it is done, it cannot be repeated, much as when a cake is devoured it is toast, when a shoe is lost, the pair is dead, when the glass is broken, the contract is sealed. There is one katabasis, one first day of school, one tenth birthday or ninth anniversary, one defense, and you sink or swim.

BIKINI

Swimming the semester while the prime minister defends with tensile instruments and the child brimming with shrimp. Shimmer. Grim reaper in the rhyming trim-work of his new home, which means he didn't pay attention to what was happening in the kitchen. Kosher means no shell fish and two sinks. It is August. So much sand around her and so many husks of having eaten. The board room was avoided, flat as a beach, pulsing in the sun. There is too much object of desire, he said, as if the salt had somehow fallen off the shelf, wedged its way between her shadow and the sea. When the sun sets, the world spreads flat, round. A lone swimmer, glimmering in the bowl of Eden's forbidden pickles, aleph of my heart, artichokes and clover. Is that what you meant? No, Betty said.

DEFENCE

No, he said. A rite of passage, a descent right into the katabasis. Yes, I wore cotton as armour. No, I won't drive you. Yes, I was not dove white, but tabula rasa. Not even lipstick. Nobody wore the low heels but I wore the wheels down to the rims until the next omission. Emission. Admission. Inadmissible evidence boring down on him. Excuses are embarrassing. Bear with me. Betting on Betty to get me out of here. Police wires and a white shirt to confess in. Surrender. Another fender bender. How harsh the wrack he thought as he disinterred the salmon. Camera-errata, full of fire and fury. They were inside the cave of the aleph, strapping my appendages to their punctum, demanding I explain my faith. "Yes," I said and smiled for the camera.