

The Desire of Song to Be an Ear: AVA and the Reformation of Genre

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"Like the clarinet with the flute, like the French horn with the oboe, like the violin and the piano--take the melody from me, when it's time" ("Rupture, Verge, and Precipice" 190).

This quotation from Carole Maso's *Break Every Rule: Essays on Language, Longing and Moments of Desire*, an autumn 2000 collection of essays and theoretical writings several of which were first published in other versions and in other venues over the past several years, engages the *forms* of Carole's thought process, her conception of writing. Though it does not appear in *AVA*, it is quintessentially *AVArrian*; it could have been one of the dying Ava Klein's thoughts. I conceptualize the sentence as a model of how that novel works and does its work in the reader, as a model for the poetics of *AVA*'s form, the poetry of its form.

In *Break Every Rule*, the sentence appears out of nowhere, unattached, at the end of the final essay, "Rupture, Verge, and Precipice Precipice, Verge and Hurt Not," right after the dedication and apparent end of that essay which coincides with the bottom of the page. This unattached sentence floats at the top of the penultimate page of the book, right above the date and place name that introduce the final two pages. On these final pages is found a piece of personal writing about personal matters that loop among many "verges": the seasonal pitch into spring, Carole's decision between positions at Columbia or Brown University, and the borders of thinking about ongoing writing projects including the essay the reader has just finished; the author is, in these final two pages and their final paragraph, poised, "on the verge," of a new season, a new job, a new essay that will be "Something for the sake of my own work, my own life I need to do," an "attempt, the first movement toward some sort of reconciliation" with and for "everything that's been kept out," of literature "past and present" (191).

"Everything that's been kept out": as the sentence sandwiched between these two pieces of writing would have been kept out, by most other writers and even by Carole herself in her novels composed before *AVA*. But Carole put it in—not as a bridge between the two (it doesn't bridge them or even have much to do with them, nor is it written in the same voice), not *as* anything other than itself, the sentence, which simply floats, hovers there in its own made space, which bodies forth, which voices, a complete conceptual world in the way poems do, flexes its space in the way poems do. And having read *AVA*, reading this sentence pulls up and into the sentence the resonances of that whole novel. It is inscribed with the form of that novel.

What does that mean, to be inscribed with the form, so that when I read the sentence, I read it as no mere sentence, but like a poem, as spinning out its own world, as planetary? So that, as planet, it pulls into itself all the other "planetary" sentences and phrases, floating in their poetic white space, embryonic conceptions pulsing in the albumen of the

pages of *AVA*? For there is something both gravitational and gestational in the way the phrases and lines of the novel--repeating in bits, repeating in wholes or parts, not repeating sometimes--go about their work, in the ways they communicate, which is not the way novels, even other experimental novels, even lyric novels, communicate.

There is an entire lineage of linguists and rhetoricians profoundly influenced by the German critical and idealist philosophers and poets who began to believe that world was mind, purely noumenal. Benjamin Lee Whorf proposed that we cannot think outside language, outside what we can express in language, and that form (of language, of the system of thought it carries in syntax and grammar) is the *only* communicable thing. Actually, part of me rather agrees with Whorf, though when I try his propositions out on students, they have always been dismayed. They say, "I know what I think, but I just can't say it." I answer: "you when 'll know think said you it 've what you." And when they cast those apparently random words into the *form* of a sentence, they understand something about the *forms* of cognition embedded in grammar and syntax. What is needed to understand Carole's sentence above? Just for fun, I tried the sentence out in one of my classes. I had only one person who had ever really listened to music intently enough to apprehend its formal properties, apparently, because she was the only one who could comprehend the sentence. I asked her to trace the process of her understanding. Her process was the process we use in understanding any metaphor, only in this sentence the full domains of each side of the comparison introduced by the word "Like" are not here, so the process is intriguingly complex; yet the metaphor is either grasped, or not, in a flash of something like the joy we have at "getting" a good joke or suddenly coming upon a solution to a problem. One familiar with the musical forms of the symphony or jazz instantly imports the understanding of those forms into the understanding of the musical domain of this comparison--how a clarinet will duet with the dominant flute that is playing the melody and then take the melody away, or the violin will take the melody from the piano. (I am thinking of Saint-Saëns's amazing Sonata No. 1 in D minor for violin and piano that Proust in *A la recherche du temps perdu* used as a prototype for his imaginary composer Vinteuil's "little phrase" that keeps re-petitioning through the duet of the two instruments--here a dialogue, a duel, an argument, a love affair, an orgasmic crescendo, a mirroring, a merging.) Then that understanding of the formal properties of music is mapped onto the "me-(you)" domain of the second part of the simile. So the main clause does not mean "take away" in the sense of taking candy from a child, but rather in the dialogical sense of musical form--the form dictates when it will be the *you's* turn to sing the melody, and the *me's* turn to be silent. It is the form of metaphor, of simile, that bends the sentence toward this meaning. It subverts the grammatical intention of the sentence. The subject of the sentence is not here (the implied *you* of "take the melody from me"), and even though grammatically the absent "you" has agency, in this sentence it must share it with, even give it up to, the objective-case "me" who is (subverting the grammatical form) textually "saying" the sentence, textually commanding, telling, asking: "take the melody from me, when it's time." When Cixoux calls for "a language that heals rather than separates" this bending, subverting, of the subject-object formula of the sentence (thought-world) in Western languages is what she meant.

In this sentence is Carole Maso's whole impetus toward dialogism (evidenced early on in parts of *Ghost Dance* and much of *The Art Lover* and in the divided selves, like Raskolnikov's divided self, of *The American Woman in the Chinese Hat and Defiance*) and also toward polyphony (performed in the choric self that is *AVA*, the choric voices/selves that sing in round and cycle in *Aureole*, and who sing in counterpoint and symphonic-choric mass the portions of the unpublished *The Bay of Angels* that I have read). Her poetic and lyric impulse, which guides the forms of her narratives, is also embedded in this strange little unattached floating sentence-metaphor. This sentence could have ended *AVA*. Or it could have been epigraphic at the beginning. For anyone who has read *AVA*, this sentence evokes the dying Ava Klein and the intertextual tapestries of her memories in dialogue and polyphony (a musical term and form, after all) with the moments and thoughts of her last day. The intertextual repetitions make this day of her death, finally, celebratory, a consecration, a *bene*-diction, a *saying* of the *good* of her life and its polyphonic re-sona-ting, re-sonneting, re-sounding of everything and everyone that she has loved, which is everything that has come to her in the *forms* of serious and hallowed art, poetry, music, film, and the hallowed words of artists about their own and other artists' *conceptions*, the intelligences and geniuses of beloved people who triggered Ava to *enact* the self. As Bakhtin wrote, "self is an event." And Carole has said and written many times over, *so is the novel*, while expressing her contempt for those novels that are *about* an event rather than *enacting* an event.

Carole has called herself a "lyric" artist and says that she reads more poetry than fiction, but that she needed "a larger canvas" than poetry provided. The metaphoric sentence above is a clue as to why she calls herself a "lyric artist working in prose." By itself, with some attention to lines, the sentence could be a lyric poem. It is over when it is over, complete in itself. But if the artist is not finished, needs a larger canvas, then, what to do? What about all the stuff that is not in it, that it does not, in its self-contained world, allow to exist, the language rhythms still pulsing in the writer, the coffee downstairs, the ringing phone, the finches at the feeder, the thought that I will see you tonight, the Saint-Saëns on the radio? When Carole visits me, I sometimes show her a new poem I am working on, and she will shake her head, marveling not so much at the poem but at the differences in composition, and say something like, "It really is a whole different process from the novel, of thought, of duration, of making, isn't it?" And I nod. Narrative, linear fiction, fiction that tells a story of an event, is comforting to write, I think. You know when it is over. You know when you have manipulated the reader into taking your perspective or subverting the perspective the way you wanted it to be subverted. The sentences, their forms, the forms of the language, are not the communication, but rather the coal cars delivering the lump of communication like coal on little tracks from writer to reader (thank you, Jakobson, for the metaphor). The axis of language that these story/event-tellers work with and through is called in linguistics the *syntagmatic* axis, the linear, horizontal, syntactical, teleologically-formulated axis of language/thought. There has been much experimentation with the comparable formal axis of thought in art, surface. In art over the past century, figure has receded into *surface*. Look at a de Kooning painting. Look at the early Franz Marc with his large animal figures and compare these to the later geometric designs that fill the surface, the early Picasso as opposed to the cubist Picasso (the formalism of Picasso is repeated as a figure in *AVA* as

the child Picasso for whom the number seven was stubbornly an upside-down nose and not a number at all, a figure's figure; Ava similarly encodes the form of the letter A with image--*draw a mountain. Now cross it*). A similar move toward surface, toward defiguration, toward mathematical repetition and away from the narrative threading of melody, can be heard in the development of modern and postmodern music. In the poetry of some experimental poets as well one can see the influence of this conception. Jorie Graham's poems become more and more syntagmatic in their form.

Because it pays more attention to surface innovation and manipulation, the syntagmatic axis of language/thought *can* subvert its own teleological drive to closure. It tends, that is, to give itself more surface, more space, and then, naturally, a longer temporal duration. Faulkner has a few three and four page sentences in *Absalom, Absalom!*; Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* makes each sentence, phrase, paragraph into a canvas of surface until with each page, one is in a gallery of the self of the composing novelist. In gaining more surface, a larger canvas, in subduing the figure in favor of a close-up of the close-up, of detailing the details (think of a painting of a sailing ship precariously tipping over a huge wave in a storm and then take the camera of your eye in for a close-up of the ocean surface and then frame the close-up as your whole painting), the syntagmatic axis can open itself up to and create a space for almost anything at all *if* the stuff for which it opens up spaces is a part of or can be made a part of the teleological drive for closure--but traditionally *not* what is outside the "novel's time," the *precious disappearing things*, not the ringing phone, the finches at the feeder, the thought that I will see you tonight, or overhearing my father and friend making pasta in the next room while I am writing a novel. Further, the syntagmatic axis, theoretically, cannot subvert its teleological drive to closure forever. It can just make the canvas/surface more complicated and larger, until meanings become simply another aspect of the surface, the syntax, the discourse in whatever medium the discourse happens to be. This kind of art or literature--that operates primarily upon the syntagmatic axis or surface--reaches closure by simply taking up all the space it has arbitrarily given itself. (The image Borges gave to this aesthetic frame, the center of which is nowhere and the circumference of which is everywhere, is the great circular book of his "Library of Babel.")

Before postmodernism, written poetry had never operated primarily along this syntagmatic axis of language (though postmodern markers in poetry have been around for a couple of centuries--some of the German romantics like Friedrich Hölderlin and Karoline von Gunderode and many of the French symbolists are true precursors of postmodernism). Instead, written poetry distinct from oral forms like the epic that have a strong narrative and syntagmatic component, has operated in its forms, tropes, and conventions, primarily on the *paradigmatic* language axis, where personally and socially formed connotations and associations, dreams and fears, desire and longing and need have their fierce and uneasy dwelling; in the co-text of the syntax and the word, in all that comes along, unbidden, with discourse and slants its meanings into the subjectivity of the speaker and the subjectivity of the listener. Poetic forms rely on repetition (not redundancy) of image, phrase, sound, all of which *in-cant*, that is, sing into the intention (the tension inward) dictated not only by the form but also by the swing of the paradigm, the metaphoric centrifuge of the amassing of associations and connotations. *Anaphora* is

primary in poetry. However, *anaphora* means re-petition, not redundancy. Even in a villanelle where lines one and three are exactly repeated three times each in a nineteen-line poem, finally merging to close the poem as lines eighteen and nineteen, each repeating line is radically changed into something entirely new by the co-text of each stanzaic triplet in which it appears. If it is not changed and made something new by the new stanzas in which it appears, the villanelle will be a mediocre poem. The focusing and refocusing on the same phrase, the same image, the same sounds (there are only two end-rhyming sounds repeated through the nineteen lines), the bringing-in of only what new imagery and information shed light, slant the light, on this *one* uni-verse, effectively blocks out a lot--the ringing phone, the finches at the feeder. Unless these are the subject of the poem or can be worked into the subject of the poem, they are not there. What is here is the power of teleology perfected, so that the end seems pre-ordained, with a force like destiny. And it is pre-ordained--through the form, which is what is communicating to us as we read, allowing us to build this universe through its blueprint, putting in our own roses, deaths, smells, yearnings, much in the same way a musician can read a musical score on paper and hear the symphony--only this one has personalized notes rather than universal ones. The personalization, the in-turning of discourse into the subjective, is the paradigmatic and is lyric poetry's *forté*, its specialty. This is language that is the event it is *about*.

These two counterweights, the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic, compose the multivalence of language. Language composed of one and not the other is innately boring: the word-salad of the schizophrenic can expand its surface space and go on forever without the closure of meaning (form), but is only interesting to language researchers and a few psychiatrists. The formulaic stories that most beginning creative writers write, weaned on the genre novel and television, contain nothing that will send the reader into the paradigmatic and the subjective, nothing but clichéd formulas that reassert the same tired characters and plots and endings, nothing but language that is about an event we have seen a thousand times, that makes all events into something seen a thousand times; not language that is an event.

The conventions of genre, in poetry and in fiction, are weighted more in one directional force of language--the paradigmatic or the syntagmatic--than the other. Each set of conventions has its limitations: both can be exclusive, but lyric poetry has had to be exclusive because of its compression and its space; lyric poetry has learned to rely on and orchestrate the white space of emptiness and silence in which, on the page and in a good oral recitation, it is embedded. But poetry is also inclusive; not on the surface, for that is always self-contained, but dialogically it invites participation that has little to do with the words and sentences; it engages, like music and art, the paradigmatic associations of the reader, which one of my favorite romantics, Friedrich Schiller, wrote of as being outside the domain of human judgment and therefore fully able to bypass human bias, ideology, will, and go without resistance straight to the *core*, the heart, of the reader. The novel can be, almost must be in its traditional representations, inclusive, but it is inclusive on its surface, on the level of plot rather than paradigmatically. Anything that can be worked into the plot and the development of character can be included.

The novel operates by sucking the reader into itself. The poem operates by sucking the reader into her/himself.

But then, there are experiments in these genres, tilting the weights, shifting the balances. I have mentioned Jorie Graham's poems, which expand their ever-expanding syntagmatic surfaces by filling them with the paradigmatic, in a truly astonishing subversion of genre. There is Paul Celan, one of the figures of repetition in *AVA* as the "drowned poet": his poems are pure paradigmatic force, imploded through the choked surface of compressed discourse; he is a language poet who digs out unbearable, wrenching associations through the exposure of the formal blueprints of language, rather like watching a human form of flesh deflesh itself to expose the bone and sinew, an interior surface of form. (*Earth was in them/ and they dug.*)

And there is Carole Maso, experimenter with the language-forms of the novel (*Who can think about a novel. I can--*Carole quotes Gertrude Stein in her most revealing essay on formal conception, "Notes of a Lyric Artist Working in Prose" 45). Carole thinks about the form of the novel, I believe, always. Once in 1991, while Carole was teaching at Illinois State University and lived a few blocks from me, while *The Art Lover* was being published and while she was finalizing her manuscript of *AVA*, I set myself my initial exercise in getting at the core of Carole's stylistic and conceptual similarities to lyric poetry. I "poeticized," "poemed" a passage from *Ghost Dance*, which I had recently taught in a graduate class that explored genre/gender bending. I had entitled the course "The Death of Narrative" after reading *Ghost Dance* and Marguerite Duras's *The War: A Memorial*.

Here is my poetization of the section of *Ghost Dance* on pages sixteen and seventeen of the paperback originally published by North Point Press in 1986.

Ghost Dance

Invention was everything to my mother and in that quiet, dark house I learned how to fill empty space and dispel silence. In that house where she was absent I learned how to conjure her back. Silence would give way to footsteps, shadows would lighten, and she would come closer. I could see her

stepping momentarily into light, her gray gaze, the beautiful bone structure of her face. Mother I would say and she would turn to reveal the tendons in her neck or a curl that encircled her ear. I would see some familiar motion of hers and it would become new. I would see something more

and I would understand her

better. I learned to halve
the distance, then make smaller divisions.
I might smell rain though the day was sunny, feel
the texture of her hair, wild in such humidity, or watch her walk
in moonlight, a strand of long hair
in the rain, a scrap
of voice, a melody, down a dark
street in Nice. I was never lonely. In my house the darkness always

gave way. My house whirls
and whirls with mist and moonlight and lovers. On hot
summer nights a handsome stranger from Spain plays
the guitar and a slow fan turns
within me. In my house there are dresses

of twilight, and snowstorms, and towers. In my house
are intricate scenarios, racehorses and flowers and satin and my mother
is a little girl in my house, drifting
to sleep, dreaming
of flowers and horses. In my house, in my heavy

house, which I carry on my back like a turtle, a dark-eyed woman
weeps for someone who is permanently lost
to her.

All I have done is simply leave things out: the father and Grandma Alice and their perspectives of the mother. A lyric poem cannot easily include perspectives other than the speaker's, emotions other than the speaker's. I've left out the actions of the mother, going to France, for instance, that did not bear upon and body forth the speaker's utter longing for her mother, the kind of longing one can only have for one who is permanently lost. I added nothing, not a word, but by selectively dropping things out, the focus remains on the speaker's house, the quiet dark house that she carries on her back like a turtle carries its home, the environment of her longing, where all things become part of the furniture and ambience of the gestation of abject desire, longing that can never be fulfilled, longing whose aim is the continuation of itself and not fulfillment. In tightening the focus to the metaphoric flexings of a single image, single perspective, and single emotion, a lyric poem bodies forth from part of a novel. All the things removed are, on the other hand, what one would need in order to write a novel, to plot a narrative, to allow for the dialogical revelations that character interactions produce. What is also foregrounded in the poem, that is only obliquely present in the novel, is the body as it voices itself textually in the hesitations and pauses and syncopations of line and stanza breaks, as it wrings itself though the language of desire spoken by one speaker through one image of longing. The body is also present in the language of the novel, but I think that is because

the novel is so lyric and it is unexpected for a novel to contain the body, to be spoken/written through a body.

In the title essay of *Break Every Rule*: "If writing is language and language is desire and longing and suffering, and it is capable of great passion and also great nuances of passion--the passion of the mind, the passion of the body--and if syntax reflects states of desire, is hope, is love, is sadness, is fury, and if the motions of sentences and paragraphs and chapters are this as well, if the motion of line is about desire and longing and want; then why when we write, when we make shapes on paper, why then does it so often look like the traditional, straight models, why does our longing look for example like John Updike's longing? Oh not in the specifics--but in the formal assumptions: what a story is, a paragraph, a character, etc. Does form imply a value system? Is it a statement about perception?" (157)

I am of course not saying that Carole is the first writer to bend and break the (masculinist) language rules, that there have not been experiments with lyricism in the novel going on for a long time. I remember reading in the mid-sixties while I was in college the Australian Janet Frame's *Faces in the Water*, not *about* her experience as a schizophrenic in the psych ward, but *the enactment* in language of the experience. I was breathless with attraction and filled with the beauty of terror. Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* affected me in the same way, as did the black (male) Jean Toomer's *Cane*. These are twentieth-century novels; in the very early nineteenth century, Georg Büchner's *Lenz* is a prose experiment with the language of schizophrenia, an enactment of schizophrenia, as it "tells" the story of the schizophrenic Jakob Lenz, a not unimportant but largely forgotten writer of that time. In these "lyric" novels (*Cane* is a mixture of fiction, poetry, and even drama), plot is buried--there is only enough of a notion of consequence, plot, to spread a delicately built bridge over the alpine chasm (Hölderlin's image, and one that Carole is also familiar with) of the dark force of the death of self: the *sui-cide*, the murder of the I inherent in language experimentation designed to try to rid the world of the separation of the self from the world and all that is not the self, a form of experimentation I believe is ultimately a world-changing, transformative healthy impulse, even though it often causes great personal suffering to the experimenter.

Why is it mostly women writers that attempt this kind of experiment with the formal properties of language as they create a novel? (Oh sure, Julio Cortázar experiments--but not with language forms. He experiments with the form of the novel while using the traditional (male) forms of language. He writes two novels, and more, in *Hopscotch*. But each of them are written in the same traditional language, the syntax of teleology and plot and character and episode. He simply reorders the sections like shuffling a deck of cards.) Why did the rise of feminism in the 1960s usher in more and more of this kind of experimentation? Perhaps for the same reasons that madhouses, attics, and psych wards were 80 percent filled with women until the 1970s; that most medical experiments in the 1940s and 1950s with shock treatment therapy and prefrontal lobotomy were on women and black men. These "othered" could offer a new language of their objectified body/mind and had an, unconscious perhaps, interest in subverting the agency of the dominant subject, those who were doing the objectifying, the separating, the

empowering, the disempowering. These language (and sometimes personal) experiments are further examples of what Cixous means in "The Laugh of the Medusa" by a "language that can heal rather than separate."

The final project in my course called "The Death of Narrative" was a trans-gender-lation of Thomas Mann's *novelle* (a masculine form of linearity if there ever was one) into a feminist text. This assignment also makes its appearance in *AVA*, as a subset of repetitions having to do with the form of art and the novel. How did that assignment appear in *AVA*? When Carole came to Bloomington-Normal she would sometimes visit my classes in comparative literature, the "Death of Narrative" course among them, which I taught in various versions for several years and which always contained that assignment, or my course in European romanticism. There are also mentionings in *AVA*, as part of Ava's mind-talk generated by her vast experience of world literature, of Hölderlin, von Kleist, and other German romantics. One night while Carole was there, I took the class through a quality of German syntax that Hölderlin explored in his poems and thought until it literally drove him mad: Because of its nominative and accusative case endings which are the same for the definite articles, German can be forced into flipping these subject and object positions in the sentence-field, making the subject the object or the reverse. Hölderlin pushed the language into doing this, effectively deconstructing the entire pattern of language-thought (Whorf's thought-world) in the Western world and committing a kind of self-death as the borders between the I-subject and the you- or it-object blurred and the two changed positions and agency. The entire class was blown away by this (the site of subjectivity and the self-other dichotomy are key notions in modernism and postmodernism), but Carole was, as she often is, profoundly affected. In a sense, she is very like her novels and their language: without skin, no shrink-wrap to keep intruders out, but instead porous, opened up to what Ellison's *Invisible Man* called the "nodes" between the words, the gaps that shred the inexorable drive of teleology. In Hölderlin's language Carole witnessed nihilism in its terrifying crucible of hope, a stunning example that what can destroy also contains what can save (Hölderlin's "Patmos") and the reverse. The openness of the form of *AVA* allows for these kinds of inclusions from her daily life, her job, her friends, into the pulsations of her mind as it strays laterally across a problem, circles back, again and again, until the pattern of straying and returning resolves the problem in a metaphoric kind of comparison. All of that becomes, as she says, her art so that she has trouble distinguishing her life from her art (and there are risks in this, she also says--the kinds of personal risks I exemplified above in Hölderlin's life, those risks that cause this kind of writing to be extraordinary acts of courage, so *in the heart* are they located). And in a way *AVA* could stand as that assignment in trans-gender-lation because of its formal--that is anaphoric (re-petitional: petitioning the mind repeatedly)--subversions of the male language of intentionality, teleological thought and practice, objectification, exclusion, empowerment and disempowerment. (*Loving repeating is one way of being*, "A Novel of Thank You" 82).

I know several women scholars my age (heading toward sixty) and younger who have had the shocking, dislocating recognition of the body's having been eliminated, abstracted, from the language of scholarship, science, and research. I remember vividly a

moment in graduate school. I was studying for my doctorate in comparative literature, a time when my first marriage was suffering the schizoid existence women who were scholars were "sentenced" to, and before I recognized that the "sentence" laid upon me as a woman-academic would lie on (to?) me in the shape of any man I would later marry until I reformed the "sentence," exploded it, reclaimed it, made it open to the very body that I sensed and thought with. I was writing a critical paper on Octavio Paz's "*Piedra del Sol*," "The Sunstone." There I was, having all sorts of intellectual fun at my typewriter "solving" the poem on a conceptual level while holding at bay the powerful physical and emotional effect the poem's reliance on *anaphora* (*loving repeating is one way of being*)--on what we would now call its nonlinear, pulsing, sexually charged, anaphoric, circling language--was having on me. I became, sitting there, *wrenched*. I thought I was coming apart. And I was. I was a living emblem of the Western philosophical mind-body split. When the pressure became explosive, I suddenly found my madly typing fingers flying through an utterly new kind of language in a paragraph of pure body, an *enactment*, a *representation* of my physical resonance--breath, sexual surging, belly sob, constellating thought--with the language of this poem. Then, the orgasmic paragraph written, I returned to my critical mode and went on until the analysis was complete in some kind of amnesiacal erasure of everything I had just written. I left the paragraph in, enclosing it in parentheses as I knew it was not the same voice or person who wrote the critical essay. The professor gave me an A on the paper and simply put a red question mark in the margin beside that paragraph. (And he was from Mexico!) Maso's *AVA* has become a formal model not only for a more inclusionary fiction whose impulse is desire rather than story, but also for the inclusionary, centripetaling-centrifuging essay, the kind that moves circularly with the planetary, gravitational pull of the paradigm, its metaphoric, associational accretions of meaning--layering, stacking, packing, connecting, webbing--until meaning has finally nothing at all to do with the words but rather with the oscillation of the paradigm, with the polyphony of the intertextual, paradigmatic self. Linear, plotted narration is irrelevant here.

In *AVA*, there is no dramatic tension of a kind we associate with the novel, but rather the kind of dramatic intention, *in-tension*, a tension that circles inward, that we associate with poetry, each revolution hinging on the re-petition, in the vortex of the larger canvas of turning pages. Carole, quoting Wassily Kandinsky, 1910 (probably his "Concerning the Spiritual in Art"): "The apt use of a word (in its poetical sense), its repetition, twice, three times, or even more frequently, according to the need of the poem, will not only tend to intensify the internal structure but also bring out unsuspected spiritual properties in the word itself. Further, frequent repetition of a word (a favorite game of children, forgotten in later life) deprives the word of its external reference. Similarly, the symbolic reference of a designated object tends to be forgotten and only the sound is retained. We hear the pure sound, unconsciously perhaps, in relation to the concrete or immaterial object. But in the latter case pure sound exercises a direct impression on the soul. The soul attains to an objectless vibration, even more complicated, I might say more transcendent, than the reverberations released by the sound of a bell, a stringed instrument or a fallen board. In this direction lie the great possibilities for literature of the future" ("A Novel of Thank You" 102-03).

"Without apology," Carole writes, "I have tried to create something of a feminine space. New kinds of intimacies. I do not believe in the myth of ungendered writing. Luce Irigaray is much better than I am on this. She says: 'Only those who are still in a state of verbal automatism or mimic already existing meaning can maintain such a scission or split between she who is a woman and she who writes' ("Except Joy" 130). This "sexuate" desiring, including, feminine space is the form and the content of *AVA*. There is some kind of story, with characters, like a delicately built bridge (Hölderlin again) underpinning, not the novel, but our expectations of what a novel is. You could remove them from this novel and it would not make any difference to the work, only to how we read the work and what we expect from it. When I have taught *AVA*, some of the students will attempt to plot something out: three husbands, their names and correct order, the final lover Danilo with Ava in the cancer institute on her last day, marrying her then and feeding her the hopeless Chinese herbs, Carlos's grandmother praying for a grandchild, Carlos foretelling Ava's death, Ava's promiscuity, her lover of one night Franz (*be careful of the intercom*). But this is a dead end. So is plotting out all the allusions to other writers, to other artists, to lived events, to pointing a finger at your teacher and exclaiming (as I had happen in class once), "You are a professor of comparative literature, you have been married several times, you studied opera, you must be Ava!" Who's on first, on second, doesn't matter. Who happened to be close by while Carole was writing and thinking (and she is always writing, thinking, gathering) so that some events from her life were incorporated into the centrifuge of *AVA* or an essay, doesn't matter. *AVA* is not a bildungsroman. Not *The Education of Ava Klein*. Ava is not going to "learn." She is *being*, fully, all her voices (every voice that Carole has loved) at full throttle, all her desire, her love, her longing, her memory, her appreciation, her pain and her fear, at once, all of her.

Instead of laboriously plotting, better to incant the repetitions, follow some through to the last petition (for at-tention, being tensed and at the ready). There is the repetition of the child playing with her shadow on the sidewalk. The re-petition of the shadow for the girl not to step on it. The re-petition of the shadow that is larger than the girl. (Watch out, the paradigm is swinging, in the image of the little girl with her shadow, it is swinging through the turning pages, gyring through the anaphora.) The repetitions circle, a vortex sinking in the well of the paradigmatic, into the shooting of the girl (maybe the same girl, maybe not) shopping with her mother for a summer dress and sandals which petitions and re-petitions the Zodiac Killer who perhaps, perhaps not, shoots her. The paradigm swings into the "signing" of the character-figures, into Ava Klein's sign, somehow implicating the very Zodiac in her fate, a Pisces (*what is this fluidity I swim through*), also Carole's sign. When I have taught *AVA*, when Carole has come to read from *AVA*, among the nonacademic types at the reading or in the class will be *AVA* groupies: they incant lines, become the chorus, "Green, I want you green"; "I am a Pisces, after all." Transcendent, they have morphed into the spiritual key of *AVA*'s music. And they are closer to *AVA* than the plotters. They are in the *Joie de Vivre* Room, not the referenced round room of the Picasso Museum in Antibes, but what it has come to mean through the re-petitioning: the moment of utter sexual desire, of utter desire to merge, change form (*the desire of the girl to be a horse, the desire of the novel to be a poem and the obvious erotics of this*), impassioned without closure, objectless desire, *quite burned by the sun*. In the *Joie de*

Vivre Room was to have been the title of *AVA*, but of course, formally, that would have been too delimiting. This constellation of images carried by the joy-of-life room *is* the most consistent repetition and amassment, along with and connected to the erotic song cycle constellation. Therefore, as a title, it would not only have referenced but would have been limited to the irony of the hospital room where Ava is dying and does die, as being a room of the joy of life, rather than this phantasmagoric space of all that the woman Ava has come to be in her life, collaged and woven and drawn up to the surface by memory and desire in a language that can heal and not separate. The reader would have read the entire novel through that lens, could have in that way manufactured a plot, a logical teleology and all sorts of heavy interpretations, the kind that belong to that other kind of novel that closes its windows and doors (Woolf's Mrs. Ramsay: *windows must be open, doors shut*) and proceeds step by step through the plotted, spearing alphabet (Woolf's Mr. Ramsay: *on to R*), the kind of novel that builds walls so that what's inside is a mystery that demands a decoder. The kind of novel that Carole has left in her wake.

AVA does not demand interpretation. It demands engagement and enactment and a spiraling up out of the deep shaft of associations into the spacious white markers that weave their silences through the syntagmatic canvas and wait for the reader to chime in with a resonance from the well of the paradigmatic, the core (heart) of the self. These chanting lovers of *AVA* have it right. They are in the spacious room of the joy of life and full of longing for something that has nothing to do with the words they in(des)cant: the desire of a person to be an artist, the desire of the novel to be a poem, the desire of a voice to become song, the desire of song to be an ear that receives itself singing. And the obvious erotics of this.

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