

Why Do Things Break?

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Edited by

Ann M McCulloch and R.A. Goodrich

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-3281-X

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-3281-6

*To three readers into the future:
Lodzia, Evie and Hendrix*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume had its origins in three conferences hosted by Cardiff University (2014); the J.M. Coetzee Centre for Creative Practice at the University of Adelaide (2016) and The National Opera Center in New York (2017) in conjunction with *Double Dialogues*. We acknowledge Professors Christopher Norris, Clive Cazeaux, and Jennifer Rutherford as well as Shelley Campbell and Helen Joy, Rita Horanyi and Kari Lyon for the provisions and co-ordination of venues that facilitated the diverse production of theatre, dance, music, poetry and discourse. We also acknowledge Dr Tony Hood for work done for the Adelaide conference and the members of the *Double Dialogues* team for efforts in making all three conferences a success.

It was at these conferences that questions concerning precursors, ruptures and breakages were first discussed and performed. We thank all those artists who presented related questions in their art and which cannot be represented here. It seems impossible that the one hundred and twenty presentations might be echoed in this book and yet the resonance is clearly present. We refer particularly here to Stephen Whittington's performance of "Truly Flabby Preludes for a Dog" (1912) by Erik Satie (in Adelaide), Elissa Goodrich & Caerwen Martin's "Contemporary Music: What is Broken, What Breaks" and Kari Lyon's arias selected from Gaetano Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835) and Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata* (1853) (in New York). Many thanks also to comedienne Kim Cea for ending the New York proceedings with flair and humour.

Finally, the editors thank the authors for their insightful treatment and interpretation of the themes related to that large question, "Why Do Things Break?"; Joan Ritchie for her close proofreading of the manuscript; and Dr Deborah Walker for permission to reproduce her painting 'the Compass'. 90 x 120 cm. Oil on Linen.

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INTRODUCTION

MINDSCAPES OF BREAKAGES: MINDS, BODIES, METAPHORS

ANN M MCCULLOCH

When something breaks one never really expects it to be the same again. Humpty Dumpty fell and broke, we are told as children, but we also learn that he could not be put together again by “all the King’s horses and all the King’s men.” This message serves as an omen perhaps for children to know that the antics of soldiers, whatever their allegiance, a place or historical moment are unlikely to renew original order after “breakage.” Nevertheless, we are “fixers” and all will be done somehow to disguise and avoid the consequences of broken things, people, institutions, regimes and all that sustains our belief in some kind of permanence despite our knowledge that there can be none—that everything is in a state of flux or becoming. But what we know does not cohere with what we desire and thus we beat against the current of our knowing and search for reasons to be kept in one space at least for a measurable period of time.

This book has its source at a wedding when one of the guests was being questioned on what he did for a living. He was a reluctant participant in the conversation and didn’t seem to believe that anyone would be interested in his obsessions. Finally, he answered: “I wish to find out why things break.” He was an engineer and at the time about to embark on research that would lead to his understanding why and when cracks appeared in the domes of buildings built as early as the fourteenth century.

The question of why things break became our obsession, and led to two international conferences, one in Adelaide, at the J.M. Coetzee Centre for Creative Practice (2016), and the other at The National Opera Center in New York (2017) and finally to this book. The contributors found in their research work, that they too had been dealing with this question in some way. As intellectuals and creative writers, they were less interested in the tangible things of objects and institutions but instead drawn to the

limitations of language; the vulnerabilities of minds and bodies in the face of breakage; the impact of interdisciplinary thought that splintered connections and codes and led to new ways of both identifying change and challenging its assumptions and ramifications.

Consequently, this study interrogates the breakages that occur in peoples' lives such as psychological breakdowns, political ruptures, and the effects of history evolving ideologically in such a manner that the axioms of the past are overturned and people are then temporarily without identity or purpose. This book combines creative writing pieces in which writers draw from personal experiences to demonstrate the impact of breakages with more discursive essays that query artificial breakdowns between disciplines and query the imperative that underpins all knowledge: its provisional nature in conflict with human need to categorize and define. It focuses on the psychologies that haunt creative autobiographical pieces as well as the plight of broken minds and bodies in the face of trauma, historical change and political events. It also looks directly at the ideas of thinkers and artists from the past and the impact their work may still have despite breakage, shifting paradigms, ruptures and re-formations. Furthermore, it queries the new formations by directly asking: why did these ideas break and why the need for salvaging the past (or authenticating the present) by identifying precursors?

Significantly, these writers were not only dealing with questions that formed the basis of their inquiry, that is, not only whether it related to a childhood memory of intense autobiographical value, but also where they stood as writers of tragic vision. Tragic vision, in this context, refers to their consciousness of themselves as artists, as wordsmiths, and the extent to which the processes of their artistry became an essential part of their subject matter (McCulloch 1983). The actual world of living, with its connections with life, is often in this situation subsumed by the task of finding the right words to express it. In an important sense, the contributors are locked in by the limitations of language and seek to find in the breakages of worlds ways in which the words that create symbols and allegories might successfully represent their vision and that precarious relationship between art and life.

Eric Heller's distinction between the allegory and the symbol is a useful one in analysing the visions of the contributors. He points out that the terms of an allegory are "abstractions" whereas the symbol "refers to something specific and concrete" (1957, 183). He gives the example of

The statue of a blindfolded woman, holding a pair of scales, as an *allegory* of Justice; bread and wine are, for the Christian communicant, *symbols* of the Body and Blood of Christ.... An allegory, being the imaginary

representation of something abstract, is, as it were doubly unreal; whereas the symbol, in being what it represents, possesses a double reality (1957, 183-184).

Epistemologically, meaning precedes narrative in allegory. For example, in mediaeval literature Christian concepts of “good” and “evil” precede the creation of characters that embody associated values. The interpretation of most modernist literature is to be found in all possible questions that can be formulated about concepts of alienation, *ennui* or ones pertaining to the problematic relationship between art and life. The new subject is not merely about life or landscape seen through a temperament; it is not expressive images of an inner world of imagination and sensuous life; it is not exploring the language of colour, form or light. It is not realism, surrealism or abstraction. Nevertheless, it may invoke some of these. It, like allegory of the past, turns its back on surface realism in order to reveal something more universal and generic. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that one of its defining qualities is that it withdraws from the immediate rendering of surface reality by metaphorically using the experience of such reality to represent inner intellectual and emotional preoccupations.

What, then, characterizes contemporary literature of the twenty-first century? Perhaps we are too close to it still to recognize difference. In many ways we continue to write in the wake of the modernist world-view. Nevertheless, meanings precede the writings of this century; this may be somewhat prescriptive meaning associated with race, gender and class. Certainly, first-person narratives dealing with the latter assume an authenticity not formerly available or known. Allegory does express a way of perceiving reality at certain times in history. The contributors to this study conflate symbolism and allegory. They look at broken things, minds, bodies and metaphors and they construct novel ways of seeing and understanding and expressing what may lie beyond the breakage and thus speak to our place in history.

Part One: Precarious Reach for Metaphor

Part One includes one reflexive interrogation of a story by Michael Meehan, a discursive essay by Antonia Pont, and two creative pieces by Marion Campbell and Jennifer Rutherford. The use of the word “precarious” here places the authors in a frame in which they recognize their insights are always concerned with the relationship between life and art. The contributors, as contemporary thinkers and creators, draw as much from abstract theoretical thought (allegory) as they do from personal

metaphors (symbols) when pursuing the question of breakage, not only in their personal and social lives, but also as artists seeking to conquer the limitations of words as well as the precarious nature of story-telling that emanate from blurred memories. The double reality of their symbolic constructions does not so much clash with the doubly abstract theoretical construction but instead conjoins dialectically in pursuit of expression. Writers of the tragic vision are conscious of fragmentation; their confrontation with it and things broken or even half-forgotten invites celebration and innovative poetic, dramatic and theoretical prose.

Chapter One, “Blurred Memory: Creative Process and the Art of Misremembering,” by Michael Meehan is a meditation on these words by Marcel Proust (1908) in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*:

The beautiful things we shall write of if we have talent are inside us, indistinct, like the memory of a melody which delights us though we are unable to capture its outline. Those who are obsessed by this blurred memory of truths they have never known *are* those who are gifted... Talent is like a sort of memory which will enable them finally to bring this indistinct music closer to them, to hear it clearly, to note it down...

This chapter offers imaginative writing as a duplicitous mode of resuscitation, bringing forward not only the “blurred memory of truths [we] have never known,” but also restoring the “blurred memory” of voices of characters we have never met, of secrets that were never actually hidden, of unquiet spirits that never had a pre-existent life, of previous writings which we have richly misread and richly mis-remembered.

The chapter explores the “deathly vitality” in the creative process of our various precursors, the medley of uncertain truths, voices, fantasies, and read and mis-read texts that rise to the mind, to the blurred realms of imagination, in the form of shadow-memories. Here fantasy then speaks of fantasy, where real memory steps aside in favour of “blurred memory,” and all writing comes to seem primarily a “writing on behalf of,” and as the tracing of an “indistinct music” gleaned from the creating domain of the phantom precursor. Meehan’s creative piece is ostensibly a re-telling of a hitchhiking adventure he had with a fellow law student in his youth. As he travels north from Melbourne to Brisbane, he encompasses not only richly humorous characters but recalls iconic landscapes endemic to the Australian bush. His reflection upon the story queries its “truth.” He writes:

Is this a story? Or is it just an anecdote? I can no longer tell. I was of course one of the students. Did it actually happen? Or after many retellings—and fifty years have passed—is it now just three parts fiction,

taking on new colour through the accretions that come with each telling, accretions that are often so small that they are undetectable, even to the teller of the tale? How far is what I have told the recalling of fact—and how far has it become more like an attempt, in the manner suggested by Marcel Proust, to trace an “indistinct music”—“truths I have never known”—an exercise in creative misremembering, or even, by repetition and aggregation, the implanting of something that feels like memory back into the realm of genuine fact?

Chapter Two by Marion Campbell is a creative piece, “Waterspout.” Although autobiographical in its source, its subsumed exegetical voice incorporates a mode of thinking that negotiates a field of thought including various genres underpinned by French theory and feminism as well as the constant flux that changes and ignites new thought from their transformative ruptures in time through both history and a double perspective that incorporates the memories of the child and the retrospective understanding of the adult. Mostly, though, it is a father’s death that is primarily experienced; the emotional content has transcended its theoretical base while being transformed by allegorical and symbolic techniques. The autobiographical source is an event when a four year-old lost her father. His death occurred in 1952 when a waterspout during an electric storm off Wattamolla, New South Wales, drew into its vortex a CSIRO Rain Physics Dakota and atomized it and all those aboard,

This auto-ficto-critical piece, engaging text and image, connects with a transgeneric tradition, arguably coming from queer spaces (via Genet, Barthes and Irigaray) and deploying a poetics of the fragmentary to present broken time. Her playing with genres engages with questions popularized by these thinkers/writers and dictates her playfulness with language and French philosophical ideas whether directly connecting with sexuality or not but drawing on feminist notions as well as the precarious place of the writer to the reader. Campbell’s piece demonstrates breakage or ruptures in the generic shifts themselves. Finally, the writer notes, that as events threaten understanding of her older and younger self, the not-yet-symbolizable exhibits its potential double reality by “crackl[ing]” like the lightning itself.

In Chapter Three Jennifer Rutherford’s “April in Kumrovec” is a short story that focuses not only on ruptures that occur at times of revolution, but also the demise of a romantic connection that had its heart both in a revolutionary zeal as much as a personal connection. Rutherford writes:

He’d been nudging his way into my dreams: a hand brushing snow from my cheek, his blue corduroy jacket beside me as I walked along the river-bank. Or, I’d see him from afar, keeping pace, on the far side of the river.

I wrote on the pretext of making a film about that time in the late 'seventies when we had met in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia. It wasn't a complete pretext. I had the crew, the funding, even the post-production sorted out, and it was a good story. Everybody said it was a good story, and the crazy thing was—it was true. And yet, so hard to fathom this side of the Wall's fall that we could ever have been those kids sent to Yugoslavia for training in revolutionary technique in the butt end of the 'seventies, as Russia invaded Afghanistan and Tito lost his legs.

The revolution comes to a very slow end in this short story on the entanglements of revolutionary and romantic fantasy and their final and inevitable demise in a holiday inn in rural Moe.

Like Meehan and Campbell, Rutherford is concerned with the past, with memory and with their impact on writing in the present. As with Campbell the past insists on being expressed and seemingly breaks through into the experience of the present. Rutherford is less artistically perplexed and relentless in her reach for metaphor. Instead she has discovered a way of bringing the past and the present into the same timeframe. We are of course aware that she is returning to an earlier time and that she is comparing the people of the past with who they have become. Yet the crossing overs between now and then appear seamless and one feels able to live in two time zones simultaneously. Her reach for metaphor is enhanced in her use of tense that succeeds in her readers existing (however precariously) in a distant time and shows the extent to which people's experiences of the past, whether of the mind or the heart, become inextricably bound with who they are.

In Chapter Four, Antonia Pont's "Inventive Temporalities," like Rutherford's piece, concerns time although in a more discursive manner, questioning how our understanding of time and how we approach it affects our creative practice. Gilles Deleuze's 1968 tripartite analysis of temporality is introduced to explain conceptions of present time—as a spatial clearing and as a line of division. Her analysis looks in particular at how Deleuze, invokes a provocative interpretation of Friedrich Nietzsche on "eternal return" as an attitude towards the future—a future which functions as an empty place-holder for the new, for a future whose only identifying feature is what is to be repeated. Pont's discussion focuses upon the logic of creative practice in light of Deleuze's formulations. Here, it is proposed, practice operates as a kind of laboratory in which a context for the new is cultivated. Hence, we find that the lot of the creative practitioner is not so much to make the future, but to face it intentionally. Pont therefore enters that metaphorical space so famously rendered by Nietzsche in order to test how it might be utilized as a springboard for

creative writers who might see innovative allegorical and/or symbolic networks for their creations.

Part Two: Broken Minds, Broken Bodies

Part Two draws on the poetics of three writers interested in poetry, prose and/or play writing. The question of why things break in this section has focused on what a person does when he or she becomes broken physically, emotionally and spiritually. Each chapter engages discursively with what has broken in them or around them. As writers, they explore the possibilities of language when artistically crafted to sharpen perceptions about living in a world as a broken human being personally and as an observer of broken things.

John O'Carroll works within the deeply personal. In the process of analyzing his physical condition, he becomes enamoured with and distracted by the sheer beauty of cancer cells under the microscope. This strategy, in turn, gives him the detachment of an artist bringing the intangible and subjective feelings of fear and pain into the foreground as aesthetic experiences and subsequent poetry. Amelia Walker, although once a subject of what she construes as inappropriate psychiatric care, speaks more as an observer, who, later as a psychiatric nurse, was appalled by how patients were treated. Her performance material utilizes further views on the power of language to represent uncanny psychiatric conditions. Piri Eddy speaks out directly as a writer who engages with the tools of both playwright and novelist and has dialogue with his character, Fishboy, who questions his creator about why he was broken and re-made as a means of dealing with otherwise hidden and grotesque truths.

In Chapter Five, "Broken Bodies: The Aesthetics of Cancer," O'Carroll addresses exegetically and poetically meeting points that are also points of breakdown. Its subject matter is cancer, not only as it happened to the author personally, but also—mainly—as a condition of life itself. This chapter explores how cancer itself is a breakdown in the body, but its treatment often also involves surgical operations. In the author's self-proclaimed medically unremarkable case, it involved being cut open, broken into, and having a part of his body, the prostate gland, removed. Before the operation, in its immediate aftermath and then afterwards, the contributor accessed scholarly articles about cancer, about alternatives, and about the side-effects with which he now lives. But such inquiry always led him to distractions, the most important of which were the dazzlingly beautiful images of cancer cells. This chapter argues how we have very inadequate ways of talking about the effects of cancers on

personal self-image and intimacy. The author's chapter contains both poetic responses to cancer as well as an implied exegetical discourse about how these poems came into being.

In Chapter Six, "This Order, Not Disorder: Break Down as Break Through," Walker draws on poetic performance and critical discussion in her attempt to secure the continuing relevance of anti-psychiatrist R.D. Laing's 1967 notion of "breakdown" as "break though" and how his writings support collective, social wellbeing. Drawing on Foucault and alluding to Deleuze and Guattari, the chapter reflects on how western psychiatry's violent limits support established socio-economic systems. The critical discussion extends these themes, examining contemporary efforts to shift beyond mainstream mental health models. These efforts include trends, among some mental health researchers, towards poetic research processes similar to those developed and deployed in disciplines of the arts and humanities. Observing commonalities between poetry's formal devices and the linguistic tendencies western psychiatry associates with formal thought disorder, the chapter uses specific examples from the author's poetic performance script to illustrate how echolalia and sound associations have offered creative and/or critical connections and directions that otherwise may have been ignored. This chapter illustrates the capacities of both literature and so-called mental illnesses to provide multiple perspectives.

In Chapter Seven, "A Body Broken: Creativity and the Grotesque" Eddy echoes artist Ben Shahn when calling the poet a "trouble maker, a dissident element" (1968, 13) who must break through to freedom so that others might follow. So, too, Eddy contends, fiction writers must destroy what they know—as well as the world around them—in order to create new meaning. This kinship between creation and destruction, the author argues, can be viewed through the lens of the grotesque where the bursting of boundaries, and the confluence of disparate and broken elements, is essential. Eddy contextualizes his argument by initially drawing attention to Bernard McElroy's suggestion that the grotesque "distorts or exaggerates the surface of reality in order to tell a qualitative truth about it" (1989, 5). This chapter asks: How then can the body be distorted to (re)create meaning and must it always be subjected, like the figures in Francis Bacon's twisted triptychs, to a violent breakage in order to uncover reality? More specifically, in this case of a work-in-progress entitled "Fishboy," author and character question each other with: Why create such a misshapen body? What right does an author have to assume control over a broken body and force it to speak? How are broken bodies perceived?

Part Three: Breaking Codes

Part Three looks at ways certain thinkers and artists have brought about new ways of thinking about the world. These disparate writers are dealing in polemics and are not merely naming a code that has been broken or one that should be. Instead they show the destruction incurred by its imposition, naming as they analyze, kinds of thinking that had become obsolete or, in the case of Castro's chapter, should be made so. Douglas Kirsner's fresh reading of Freud highlights the extent to which Freud's philosophy broke with past ideas concerning the way humankind thought about its worldly condition whether in relation to sexuality, morality, and civilization as well as the very way it had constructed "meaning" itself. Brian Castro shows himself as an oppositional force against twentieth-first century educational practices within the academy. The code he wishes to be broken is one that privileges exegetical responses to creative work over the creative work itself. Furthermore, Castro introduces the seminal proposition that art is a precursor to thought, the latter transforming into a form of rationality that has had the power to spiritually destroy art. One hears a Nietzschean refrain, "Consciousness destroys the primal oneness of the universe" (1872, 64), as one reads Castro's discursive component followed by a creative piece that enacts his insights, yet with the spirituality intact. Pavlina Radia positions Valentine de Saint-Point as a major code breaker of the misogyny inherent in modernist Futurism as represented by its founder Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. De Saint-Point, in Radia's chapter, is celebrated in her many roles: performer, playwright, journalist and theorist with particular attention given to being the first woman to write a futurist manifesto. Radia explains that de Saint-Point's manifesto broke codes because it challenged futurist misogyny and associated humanist nostalgia. De Saint-Point, asserts, in breaking down a humanist vision that was Eurocentric and patriarchal, created an alternative one that emphasized "the fluidity between genders, highlighting masculine and feminine complementarity."

In Chapter Eight, "Freud: A Precursor Breaking into the Contemporary Zeitgeist," Kirsner maintains that Sigmund Freud's major contribution spanning six decades lies not in what he achieved—significant though that was—but in what he began. Freud inaugurated a whole new orientation and reformation in our understanding of the inner world and its relations with the outer world across arenas as diverse as philosophy, sexuality and mental health, the arts, sciences and politics. Included in this chapter is Freud's analysis of the individual and the collective, the philosophical and clinical aspects of psychoanalysis and its connections with culture or

civilization. The chapter brings new insights to well-known concepts such as the talking cure, infantile sexuality, transference, the unconscious, and how dreams, psychopathologies of everyday life, and “madness” were meaningful phenomena. This chapter emphasizes that Freud’s systematization of the unconscious was a twofold assault: first, against prevailing intellectual prejudice and, secondly, against restrictive aesthetic and moral values. Kirsner looks at why things did break and also the long-term ramifications of these breakages.

In Chapter Nine, “The World, the Sex, and the Critic,” Castro deals with critical questions that have informed and intruded upon the “sacred ground” of the writer. In the first instance, Castro asserts that poetic prose is sometimes seen as an adjunct to poetry, but not exactly a form in itself. This chapter is a work of *prosody*, of rhythm and reflexivity, where *prosody* conjures up presence through language, while prose, Castro insists, wedded to exegetical reasoning, heralds the destruction of the poetic. Underpinning this chapter is his argument that

With the increasing professionalization of Creative Writing as a discipline in universities, there is a lingering *ressentiment* over why creative work can have the status of academic scholarship. Yet is this not the cart before the horse given that all academic literary scholarship is secondary to the primary production of culture and literature? From F.R. Leavis to Slavoj Žižek, the initial work of art is still something to be discussed *hospitably* because it is generously open, naively vulnerable, and not avariciously protected like an aggressive theory of appropriation and possession.

Exemplifying his views, this chapter has a creative component that explores sexuality and gender through ancient perceptions of gender, friendship, and further explores why art is the precursor of what has become spiritually broken through rationality.

In Chapter Ten, “Valentine de Saint-Point: From Modernist Destructivism to Digital Post-Human,” Radia challenges early Futurist misogyny and humanist nostalgia that often accompanies an analysis of the subject. Radia explores in the breakages within the frame of Futurism an early feminist response that re-interpreted the legacy in line with re-conceptualized humanist ideals. She does this by illuminating how de Saint-Point anticipated the posthuman subject of the digital era and the challenges it poses to the humanist agenda. Radia argues that the new humanist subject experiences a kind of “bodily and psychic death” while simultaneously becoming “a diversity of becomings,” an assemblage of intensities that dispense with organizations and the post-human subject as a conglomerate of human and non-human energies, desires and affects.

Radia discusses how a radical re-thinking of the humanist ideal as a “civilizational mode” of “radicality, normalcy and normativity” resulted under de Saint-Point’s creation of an affirmative post-humanism. She also identifies the way de Saint-Point combatted gendered dualism, social clichés and western rationalism. Radia’s analysis demonstrates how de Saint-Point’s parting with Futurism’s evangelical faith in technology highlights instead the fluidity of ideas as bodies in motion—her work dealing as it does with a fusion of the arts: poetry; dance and music. This chapter also looks at commercial, celebrity artefacts constructed in this decade. Her examination of the holograph created to honour Michael Jackson after his death, harboured, she argues, an applied nostalgia for an inappropriate form of humanism.

Part Four: Breaking Paradigms, Making Precursors

Part Four explores four very different responses to the question of both the existence and, if applicable, the purpose of precursors. Each essay writer here is interested in how paradigms of thought change, but simultaneously they are interested in how writers usurp, break from, or are nourished and furnished by earlier writers. R.A. Goodrich is dubious about the value of the concept of the precursor. Matthew Sharpe, by contrast, argues that often identifying a possible precursor gives further value to that thinker when identifying a philosopher who arguably follows in the wake of the earlier thinker. David Harris circumvents the problems associated with cause and effect that is somewhat inevitable when dealing with precursors. By embracing the Deleuzian notion of “assemblage,” he examines how ideas across time can be seen almost ahistorically and attest to the “resonances and connections between them.” Harris speaks of tracing a genealogy across three centuries of thought and perhaps identifying these ideas of the body and the mind and the flow of relations that might become strengthened with each new incarnation, thereby reflecting, if not progression, new ways of thinking about their relations. Christopher Norris, by contrast, is quite satiric about the role and production of supposed precursors and demonstrates that, in his view, there is more destruction than construction in such identification.

In Chapter Eleven, “Situating Precursors,” Goodrich critically examines variant notions of precursors and seminal assumptions made about them when applied to the arts. After reviewing key semantic networks clustering around the concept of precursor and its contexts, it briefly explores Borges’ provocative 1951 essay, “Kafka and His Precursors,” with a view to pinpointing those features he associates with

the critical enterprise. It then investigates the way in which artistic practice is conceptualized when an unfolding set of artistic precursors by two prominent twentieth-century critics, T.S. Eliot and A.C. Danto, is implemented. Thereafter, the nature of relationships to artistic precursors is re-assessed through the concept of internal or intrinsic relations that threatens the very coherence of the common stance assumed by Borges, Eliot, and Danto. By contrast, it next explores the socio-psychological conception of contexts or situations by way of the field theoretical framework formulated by Kurt Lewin in order to demonstrate the sense in which those adopting the role of the critic might more coherently engage past or anticipated precursors. Nonetheless, the chapter returns to the problematic epistemological status of claims, whether made retrospectively or prospectively, about artistic precursors, ending with three contexts potentially complicating how attributions are made.

In Chapter Twelve, “Camus’ ‘Midday’ Thought: A Precursor to Speculative Realism,” Sharpe contextualizes and explains the new philosophical movement known as Speculative Realism which emerged for the Anglophone audience in 2007. Sharpe focuses on one of its four main proponents, Quentin Meillassoux, and explicates his post-Kantian position. Sharpe via a generalist survey of a history of philosophical ideas heralds the extent to which speculative realism has captured the imagination of contemporary philosophers who would like, perhaps, to find a meeting place between analytical philosophy and continental philosophy—to traverse the division between the noumenal and the phenomenal. Sharpe in the first instance outlines the 2006 monograph, *After Finitude*, by Quentin Meillassoux which presents the speculative realist position. Sharp explicates Meillassoux’ opposition to Kant’s correlationism which is explained in terms of the view that what we call external objects are nothing but mere presentations of our sensibility and that its true correlate, that is, the thing itself, is not cognized at all through these presentations and cannot be. Speculative Realism gives objects and nature a central position and a physical tangibility, hence an interest in non-human nature emerges. In this chapter Albert Camus is identified as a precursor to Speculative Realism and Sharpe tests this theory with reference to Camus’ literary and philosophical texts within a frame of debate that engages with pivotal commentators on Camus works. Sharpe outlines Camus’ abiding and primary allegiance to classical Greek and Hellenistic philosophy, drama and culture, reinforced by Camus’ own experience of growing up in Mediterranean North Africa, illuminating Camus’ stand that he, like the Greeks, believed in nature. Sharpe considers

Camus' critique of "German philosophy" on behalf of a renewed contemplative sense of nature; his deep opposition to any and all anthropomorphic visions of the universe; and his philosophical realism about the "inhuman" majesty of the natural world, a sense of which he held the West needed desperately to recover—all position him as an unsung precursor of today's belated realist turn in continental philosophy.

In Chapter Thirteen, "Assembling Spinoza, Guattari and Cormac McCarthy," Harris focuses upon how assemblage theory, influentially propounded by Guattari and Deleuze (1980), functions as an alternative to appeals to precursors and their implications for artistic paradigms. Harris illustrates this belief by exploring ways of associating the thinking of Félix Guattari, especially in his sole-authored works, with that of seventeenth-century intellectual Spinoza's and turn-of-twenty-first century novelist Cormac McCarthy, specifically *The Road*, without upholding any causal relationship amongst them. Although McCarthy is rarely connected to Spinoza and Guattari and the latter's sole-authored works have only received limited attention, this chapter argues that all three writers construe self or subjectivity as a relational process where bodies, when encountering other bodies, are fundamentally shaped by them. Upon entering productive encounters, this process manifests a transition towards collective emancipation and, it is also contended, a kind of redemption not as a form of closure but as a continuing enactment of affirming relations or techniques of existence. Such emancipatory, redemptive moments, as demonstrated by an analysis of the Boy in *The Road*, take place in ecological crises of total devastation, physically, socially, and psychologically. It is a world where human existence, as Guattari diagnoses it, is "contingent and repeatedly challenged"; where existence is "a rupture of equilibrium, a flight ahead developing...in reaction to the cracks, gaps and breaks" (1987, 82).

In Chapter Fourteen, "A Plain Man Looks at the Angel of History," Norris' verse-essay is inspired by Walter Benjamin's 1940 "Theses on the Philosophy of History" regarding Paul Klee's "Angelus Novus." Norris draws attention to how Klee's painting perhaps suffers under Benjamin's scrutiny and will continue to do so in the hands of theorists into the future. This chapter identifies the flaws of Benjamin's exegesis and sees it as a dangerous precursor to future readings of Klee. Norris' critical and satiric eye looks at the precarious balance that exists between (exegetical) text and image and shows that more nonsense than not is extended towards the artwork. He contends that interpretations, whether Marxist, Freudian or Derridean, whether seen as allegory, materialism or symbolism, are fraught with errors. Norris argues that interpretations and all kinds of de-

coding with the “threads of history” are merely “hermeneutic slants” that further complicate and distort the meaning of the work. He implies that the relationship between past and the present is spurious. Although Klee’s angel embodies for Benjamin a means of making it possible “to understand a humanity that proves itself by destruction,” and that the suffering incurred by ancestors fuels the future in a positive way, Norris’ critique is two-fold: first, he is critical of Benjamin’s interpretation that Klee’s painting means that it is by viewing the horrors of the past that we will be impelled to move forward and, secondly, he is critical of the reduction of an image to paradigms of thought always in the state of being broken.

Fifty years ago, E.M Cioran expressed the fear that writers entering into their creative works, whether philosophically or autobiographically, were bringing about its demise. He wrote:

Today Descartes would probably be a novelist; Pascal certainly...But, ironically, it is just such minds that are sapping the novel from within; they introduce problems heterogeneous to its nature, diversify it, and pervert and overburden it until they make its architecture crack...Whenever philosophers insinuate themselves into Letters, it is to exploit their confusion or to precipitate their collapse (1956, 149).

Although the contributors to *Why Do Things Break?* do not share Cioran’s foreboding, they certainly enact “a cracking of the architecture” both creatively and discursively, identifying and over-riding change and shamelessly engaging with a tragic vision. Things break whether minds, bodies or metaphors. Fifty years later, artistry and philosophy comeingle, breaking old allegories and metaphors and creating visions and knowledge beyond the breakage.

Acknowledgement

The concept of “Why Do Things Break” emerged from a conversation with Professor John Price at the marriage of Professor Michael Meehan and Dr Juliet Horsley in Lancefield, Victoria, Australia, on the 14th January 2014.

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PART 1:

PRECARIOUS REACH OF METAPHOR

CHAPTER ONE

BLURRED MEMORY: CREATIVE PROCESS AND THE ART OF MISREMEMBERING

MICHAEL MEEHAN

The beautiful things we shall write of if we have talent are inside us, indistinct, like the memory of a melody which delights us though we are unable to capture its outline. Those who are obsessed by this blurred memory of truths they have never known are those who are gifted... Talent is like a sort of memory which will enable them finally to bring this indistinct music closer to them, to hear it clearly, to note it down... - Proust (1908)

This is the story of a story and a meditation on Proust's words from *Contre Sainte-Beuve*.

I

Once upon a time – many years ago – two law students decided to hitchhike to Brisbane from Melbourne. For much of the journey – in those days - rides were relatively easy to find. The weather was good, and even the long waits by the side of the road, when the traffic was sparse, was pleasant enough. Even in places where there was nothing much to see – just telephone poles, long lines of fencing vanishing into the distance, the odd curious galah, the main road in glistening bitumen with shining mirages in the distance, the dirt track for trucks and for droving stock from paddock to paddock running alongside.

Hours sometimes passed in this pleasant and unsurprising ordinariness.

There was the ride with the bleary-eyed truck driver, hauling a huge semi-trailer, and cursing his way up the coast for the umpteenth time. “You sell your soul,” he grumbled over and over, “once you climb aboard one of these fucking things.” There was the farmer and his wife, he

pompous and seizing the chance to pontificate from way out on the Far Right on whatever subject arose, his wife terminally bored and overridden into sluggish muted acquiescence by his side. The thinking, the talking, had been conceded his way, many years ago. The students offered silence and the occasional sound of assent and encouragement, as they ticked up mile after precious mile on the long journey north.

There was the ride with the food technologist in an old Land Rover, who among other things explained at length the process of manufacturing the caterer's egg roll, with one long continuous yoke encased in one long continuous white, easy for slicing for salads. There was the drag racer, towing his Valiant dragster behind, who confessed that he could neither read nor write, and who explained how he handled the menus in the various roadhouses and pubs along the routes that ran between the various drag races up and down the country. Who suddenly declared that he needed to sleep, pulled up by the side of the road, and was snoring in seconds, while the students took themselves back to the side of the road, to wait for the next lift.

If there's a story here, though, it begins near the turn-off to Yass, where they were dropped off by a fat chemical engineer in a shiny corporate Falcon on his way down to Canberra. Here, it was a long wait. The road was busy, but the hours rolled by, there were no offers. Until at last, in the distant haze, they saw an old FC Holden, black and battered, emerging out of the haze. By now, the students had developed a bit of an eye for likely lifts, and this one, slow and wobbly on the road, looked like a winner.

The Holden jerked to a halt, skidding in the gravel by the side of the road. A tousled and unshaven fellow, sitting awkwardly on the passengers' side, wound down the window.

"You guys travellin' then?"

There were two of them in the car. The driver was older, shrivelled and beaten looking. When he spoke, it became clear that he had no teeth. He was wearing a rumpled black suit and a grubby white shirt, with no tie.

"Make sure the puckin' door's closed," he said. To say the "f" clearly, it seems you need at least a few of your teeth. "Just watch that puckin' door. It flies open. Pumthin's buggered wif ver catch."

It was the other fellow in the passenger's seat, though, who was the talker. On and on, as they made their way up the road to Sydney. Now and then the driver mouthed something about the "puckin' Sydney traffic," of which it seemed he was in mortal dread. Apart from that, he was mostly silent, just struggling to keep the car on the right side of the road, while the passenger told his story.

He was seated very awkwardly. He was, they now saw, encased in plaster from his chest down to his knees. The cast was designed so that he was locked into a half-standing, half seated position, so that he could still sort-of-sit, sort-of-stand. It didn't seem to dampen his spirits. He was, he said, on his way to Sydney to see his girlfriend.

"When I get there," he said, "there's goin' to be two big bangs. And the second one will be when I close the door!"

He was, it emerged, a fellow hitch-hiker. He and his brother-in-law were at a party in Fitzroy. He'd fallen off a balcony, during the festivities, and had broken his back. Hence the plaster cast. He and his brother-in-law had then run out of money—the plaster can't have come cheaply—and he needed to get back up to Sydney to find some. The students found themselves thinking of the girlfriend.

The brother-in-law decided that it'd be best if this fellow with the broken back, crouched over and on crutches, was the one to hitchhike up to Sydney to get the money. He was more likely to attract a bit of sympathy, he said, and easy lifts. He'd been picked up by the Holden driver that morning outside Albury, and the two of them were now great mates.

It wasn't too much further along the road before another hitchhiker was spotted, in the shade by the side of the road. The Holden sputtered and swerved to a stop, and the hiker with his baggage was welcomed in. Again, the black rumpled suit and grubby slept-in white shirt. A few brusque introductions took place. It turned out that the toothless driver and the new passenger—who looked like a boxer who had lost just a few too many fights—were both just out of jail. The suits and shirts were remnants from their last court appearance. The story of the fall from the balcony, the broken back, and the journey up the Hume Highway in a cast and on crutches was retold.

"Two big bangs, and the second one when I close the door."

The driver, meanwhile, was getting agitated. "It's ver puckin' Sydney traffic," he said. "I just don't like ver traffic."

The new passenger suggested they stop for a beer, to make him feel better. They stopped outside a pub, in the next town, and the new mates in their rumpled suits gently prized the front passenger out of the car and up to the bar, where his plaster cast neatly facilitated his sitting on a bar stool, and leaning forward over his beer.

Everyone bought the driver a beer, in the hope of steadying his nerves for the puckin' Sydney traffic.

Getting back in the car again was an awkward venture. The plaster cast didn't seem to lodge into the Holden's front seat as easily as it did, and the