

AFTERWORD

L'après-coup

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A paratext?

More than a boundary or a sealed border the paratext is, rather, a *threshold*, or – a word Borges used apropos of a preface – a ‘vestibule’ that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an ‘undefined zone’ between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard or fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world’s discourse about the text), an edge.¹

In the early pages of *Palimpsests*, in 1982, Gérard Genette redefines transtextuality as the subject of poetics,² and extends his system of transtextualities into a five-part schema: intertextuality – a relation of co-presence between two or more texts (or in Genette more literally than in Julia Kristeva the actual presence of one text within another, through for example quotes, plagiarism, allusion); paratextuality comprising those liminal devices and conventions, both within the book (peritext) and outside it (epitext) that mediate the book to the reader, for example, its title, subtitle, prefaces, postfaces, forewords, notes, blurbs, book covers, dust jackets . . . allographic or autographic signals; metatextuality – the transtextual relationship that links a commentary to ‘the text it comments upon (without necessarily citing it)’, this for Genette is the critical relationship par excellence; hypertextuality – the literature in the second degree or the superimposition of a later text on an earlier one, in other words, a relationship relating text b (hypertext) to an earlier text a (hypotext); and architextuality (or architexture).³ According to Richard Macksey, the ‘topology’ explored by Genette in *Paratexts* is one of the ‘borderland’, between the text and to ‘outside’ to which it relates.⁴ For Macksey, Genette’s notion of the paratext is neither on the interior nor on the exterior, neither container or contained, but as

an undecidable space: 'it is on the threshold; and it is on this very site that we must study it, because essentially, *perhaps its being depends upon its site*'.⁵

I

It is a hot day, the hottest day so far this July. And it is a London kind of heat, an air sticky with pollution drifts in off the Euston Road.

All that day we sit in G02. The backs of our legs stick to the grey plastic chairs. And dark patches spread out under our arms.

Periodically images are projected onto a rough and white(ish) wall. Traces of yellowing masking tape peek through. The feverish weeks of final crits have just passed. Except for us, the building is now empty; the summer show has come and gone. Exhaustion hangs over the place.

Steve moves to the window, and tries to let in some air, but that window has been stuck shut for as long as I can remember, and most likely a lot further back than that, possibly since the 1970s.

Sophie has, in that typically understated and elegant way of hers, brought a fan. It is lacy and black, and rather large (possibly flamenco?). She wafts it gently, we breathe in relief. It is our only breeze today.

There is hope. Apparently there is air conditioning.

We turn it on. A loud background buzzing begins.

We turn off again. Better to be hot than deaf to the beautiful words being read aloud.

Maria talks of the potential of the amateur, Tony in languages of the street. At one point James is in the corner, canary yellow features somehow, possibly in the form of a hat?

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We weren't just architects, but artists and geographers in the room that day. I remember now that it had been my ambition to bring together writers from across disciplines to see what we could perform together in what I thought of as a working of writing's hyphen:

- *writing.*

L'après coup

The psychoanalytic setting is a spatial construction, but it is also a temporal process. The French psychoanalyst Jean-Luc Donnet has described his interest in the setting as a construction of a site, which can be connected with both space and time, with 'structure (geography) and history'.⁶ But in order to focus on the setting's temporality and to draw attention to 'the primacy of the dynamic point of view', Donnet chooses not to discuss the setting as a site, but to use the term 'analyzing

situation'.⁷ An understanding of the setting as a situation rather than a site focuses attention on time, and this is something that another French psychoanalyst, André Green, has examined in great detail:

I have tried to describe how time functions in the session. I think that an analyst at work listens and suddenly realizes that such an element belonging to one chain of association has indirect connections with an earlier element that he had heard and I call this *retrospective reverberation*. On the other hand, the analyst listens and listens to something, which he foresees as announcing that the patient is going to talk about this and that, and this is a prospective association, which I called *heralding anticipation*. What one has to understand is that the linearity of association is of no importance. What is important is the connection that you can make backwards and forwards and I call this *associative irradiation*. You have to pay attention to the movement, to the irradiation of the signifiers and to the way you connect the signifiers either with traumas or earlier memories or affects. The important thing is that there are degrees of tensions in each part of the material which are always threatening to break the thread of the discourse either by an overwhelming affect or by the tendency to act out. All this movement is a movement of breaking apart, coming together, getting closer to the analyst, turning away from him, and this is what I call the movement. We also see the struggle between constructing something and destroying something. Winnicott gave us a very interesting observation on time tolerance, on the quantity of time during which the child can tolerate the absence of the object or its unavailability. But what Winnicott says is that after a certain amount of time the object as such disappears, and it then makes no difference in the future if the object is present or absent, because the only real thing is the absence of the object.⁸

Through his interest in the movement of time in the session, and the tensions between processes of anticipation and retrospection, Green discusses the bidirectionality of language and how this can involve movements both forward and backward.⁹ 'Poetry', for example, and according to Green, 'goes *vers l'arriere* (backwards) (vers, which in French means "towards", and "verse"), whereas prose goes forwards'.¹⁰ Green also considers how the *après-coup* might relate to an *avant-coup* – so a before as well as an after: 'the anticipatory event (*l'avant-coup*) and the retroactive attribution of new meaning (*l'après-coup*)'.¹¹ These temporal concepts of anticipation and retrospection or retroaction Green relates to how trauma makes itself felt not only 'in its original occurrence (the earliest scene), but in its retrospective recollection (the latest scene)',¹² and also to the ways in which anticipation and retrospection might be experienced through language, through another back and forth process, described earlier, which Green calls 'associative irradiation':

By this means, free association is liberated from its tie both to the hierarchical categorization of the discourse and to progression (or to its opposite,

retrogression) and gives birth to a multi-directional temporality, producing a reticulated aboescence which stands in contrast to the order of words of the sentence interpreted in terms of the logic of consciousness. It is thus possible to speak of ‘associative irradiation’, the elements of the discourse, following this double trajectory, retroactive and anticipatory, resonate or link up with each other more or less directly, depending on the sound or the meaning, now prey to the activation of the unconscious.¹³

Notes

- 1 Genette (1997a [1987]: 1–2).
- 2 Genette (1997a [1987]: 1).
- 3 Genette (1997b: 1–7).
- 4 Genette (1997b: xiv–xv).
- 5 Genette (1997b: xvii).
- 6 Donnet (2009: 8).
- 7 Donnet (2009: 8).
- 8 Green (2008: 1038).
- 9 Green (2011: 18).
- 10 Green (2011: 18).
- 11 Green (2002: 36).
- 12 Green (2005: 175).
- 13 Green (2002: 53).

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- Donnet, Jean-Luc. 2009. *The Analyzing Situation*. Translated by Weller. London: Karnac Books.
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