

## PAUL MAGEE

### The 14<sup>th</sup> Floor (an hypothesis)

Here it seems that we cannot say: “if A=B, and B=C, then A=C,” for instance. And this sort of trouble goes through the subject. Or suppose you want to speak of causality in the operation of feelings. “Determinism applies to the mind as truly as to physical things.” This is obscure because when we think of causal laws in physical things we think of *experiments*. We have nothing like this in connection with feelings and motivation.

*Ludwig Wittgenstein*<sup>1</sup>

*The 14th Floor (an hypothesis)* will take the form of an experimental novel, set in its entirety on various fourteenth floors of buildings all across a city like Melbourne or Sydney, or both. This cross-section is intended to offer to investigation a socioscape, as in Tolstoy or Dickens, but here high-rise, and rather more twisted. The point is that the fourteenth floor is usually in fact the thirteenth—not that the number thirteen has any power of its own, but rather that the very act of erasing and writing over it makes living there rather strange. After all, nothing happened, did it?

*Cutting my face while shaving  
is  
cutting my face while shaving  
in his mirror  
deflects my father shaving  
too close to curb  
shatters and that is my face*

The goal of my research is to generate a working model of the mind. With Wittgenstein, I hold that a model of the mind can only be realised through scientific experimentation. Contra Wittgenstein, I believe that this condition can be fulfilled. The University of Technology, Sydney is the appropriate site in which to conduct this project because it offers the facilities in which to hypothesise and conduct experimental literature.

For an experiment is in fact an act of reading. In seeing results in experimental phenomena, the scientist imports the series of “logical interpretants” which act to treat atoms in a chamber as elements of a broader code, as signs.<sup>2</sup> I’m quoting Charles Saunders Peirce. Of the series of “logical interpretants,” or conclusions, to which an experiment gives rise, none, Peirce writes, “can be the final logical interpretant, for the reason that it is itself a sign of that very kind that has itself a logical interpretant.”<sup>3</sup>

Literature is, needless to say, subject to the same constraint. The acquisition of scientific knowledge is thus to be understood as the consolidation of certain habits of reading:

each new instance that is brought to the experience that supports an induction goes to strengthen that association of ideas—that inward habit—in which the tendency to believe in the inductive conclusion consists.<sup>4</sup>

Now my reader, to give the analogy its proper form, is to be understood as a scientist reading results into the 14<sup>th</sup> (in fact the 13<sup>th</sup>) floor experiment I construct. For it is possible to fall into words. Peirce describes another unit of signification (in contrast, if not strict contrast, to the *logical interpretant*) as the *index*:

it is in dynamical (including spatial) connection both with the individual object, on the one hand, and with the sense of memory of the person for whom it serves as a sign, on the other hand.<sup>5</sup>

What I want to put into the hands holding this page is the 13<sup>th</sup> floor: “anything which startles us is an index in so far as it marks the junction between two portions of experience.”<sup>6</sup>

*(Here  
optic nerves  
dangle  
they are open poppies  
in the evening  
air)*

*I must have blinked*

Sometimes it happens shaving. In other words, we have staged the following hypothesis:

- A psychosis seeks to live out the proposition that “It is not the case that there is a floor missing.”

To define these terms a little more precisely: *a floor missing* provides the subject of the unconscious with its foundation, its inescapable predication (pre-requisite to any structure *per se*) upon the desire of the Other. When the Sufis seek to cast off the Self like smoke from a flame, what burns still is precisely the *You* to which we, as walking question marks, are ultimately addressed.<sup>7</sup> Where else could the foundations of the very buildings, houses and lives we live in speak from, if not somewhere Other than right here? It’s psychotic to think otherwise.

### **the 14th floor (an hyperthesis)**

Most of the time love speaks in prose. Me too. *The 14th Floor* is inhabited by a second novel, this one a first person affair. Colour page segments bloom at various points from

the scientific work, and the page numbers struggle to catch up. Here you will discover a *haibun*, or prose diary with *haiku*, a distant echo of Matsuo Basho's *Narrow Road to the Interior*, but here high-rise and rather more twisted.<sup>8</sup> These narrow paths of colour will trace the narrative of someone wandering through the corridors of the first novel. The narrator will simply see things, whatever that means: views out the window, glimpses of passing helicopters, or butterflies, prose interiors, instants, brief, already gone.

And their reflections which last a little longer. This second novel, the working title of which is *Narrow Road to the Exterior*, may perhaps open or close as follows:

Envelope in hand, I stood by a winter window near the doorway to the administration office, uncertain, like someone off in the distance. I thought of another window, the friend's flat where I live this week, of love and killing yourself, why one always seems to reflect the other. Out the open window, and fourteen flights down, I threw the first draft of this narrow road:

*Anderson's Imagined Communities homogenous empty time all bound by love and by travel both ego-syntonic activities like the syllogistic Socrates is one of us all of us are nationals therefore Socrates is a national strictly homologous to Peirce's triadic sign a habit like Lacan's love makes a sign says if  $A=B$  and  $B=C$  then  $A=C$  we shift to Hegel's Phenomenology a work of mourning overcoming indwelling with the rises like every day morning negative conclude with appropriate quote from Basho cry curriculum vitae have drink submit to application fall*

A wall of words, falling fourteen flights down, weighed-down butterfly dying. I forgot to add the question that rises up to haunt me as day, burnt through, flickers, turns to night, to haunt me by adding: *No. 364: Is a bit of white paper with black lines on it like a human body?* Uncertain, like someone off in the distance.

I turned, as if I were a page, back into the room. White walls and sit-com lighting cast me once more into the blankness of it all. Why call *this* bit of paper number 364, as if it were the door to a flat, an open winter window flat? Why make *this* proposition fall on *this* page.<sup>9</sup> Why a number? Why make it so cold comfort clear that we're all cast to leap out the window, or at least die, or fall in love, on one of the 365 days of the year, excepting leap years? There's nothing number than a number.

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Inside there's a picture of the pond where Ophelia lands on the wall hanging by the telephone table.

All the landscapes here are interiors. They make you reflect, like an inside-out Basho, staring, *sun high overhead*, at the three-mile bay at Matasushima, to reflect on *islands on top of islands, islands like mothers with baby islands on their backs, islands cradling islands in the bay*.

The pond is really quite pretty, not yet frozen over, human body, with lines on it. Ophelia's in company, her numbness thaws, she floats amid

*philosophic ducks thinking being qua qua*

A question: does love leap out the window or in? I graffiti flying ducks, in ball-point pen, on the wall by the phone. Little picture propositions. There's someone—I get butterflies—I could call about this:

*This page now  
bears the imprint of your body  
ruffled sheets, rounded shadow*

*Were our words too perfect?  
did they leave you no shadow?*

Your poem, do you remember, it was only last week? Hello, this is proposition number 364, do you recall?, you were the roof and I was the floor and we fucked like two houses meeting inside of each other. Do you remember? You turning into my arms and legs the table, the bath overflowing, the bed flooding with ponds and pools of you do you remember? *Call waiting*, do you recall? *Hold please hold please*. Recall me proposing? *Hold please*, hello? *Hold please hold please hold please* hello

I received a call on a phone like this once—all phones are like this once really—and all the life within me drained out the window butterflies dying ducks drowning islands of joy disappearing is a bit of paper a picture of reality a body a window frozen over.

Is love psychotic?

### **The 14<sup>th</sup> Floor (an hypothesis) cont.**

My second hypothesis, that the work also seeks to stage:

- A neurosis seeks to negate the proposition that “It is not the case that there is a floor missing.”

The triple negative here is intended to convey something of the contorted head-space.

There’s a missing floor. Hamlet was alive to this: “I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself the king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.”<sup>10</sup> Now my reader, to give the analogy its proper form, is to be understood as a scientist reading results into the 14<sup>th</sup> (in fact the 13th) floor experiment I construct. Through the gap in a

nutshell or a palace, the scientific eye pours. Only here we are high-rise, valleys are living rooms, TV sets are mountain views and the question they ask: How can literature be a science?

*Telescope the dark heavens in  
to a dark star, five hundred watts,  
eye-light burning*

*A tongue plummets to this Earth of death the rock of Lazarus.  
Swelled in his  
throat it speaks*

*All this time melted over morning  
tea and  
my dead*

*Row boat no it won't  
like silence oars words  
You*

Wittgenstein was right. There's not even any bricks.

My third hypothesis:

- There is no such thing as a scientific reading of a novel because literature aims to split its readership into a multitude of truthful readings. We are its atom.

It makes us nothing in common.

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Notes by Rush Rhees, after a conversation, Summer 1942," in Cyril Barrett, ed., *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1966), 42.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Saunders Peirce, "Pragmatism in Retrospect: A Last Formulation," in Justus Buchler, ed., *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (Dover: New York, 1955), 277.

<sup>3</sup> Peirce, "Pragmatism in retrospect," 277.

<sup>4</sup> Peirce, "Pragmatism in retrospect," 278.

<sup>5</sup> Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic: the Theory of Signs," in Buchler, 107.

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<sup>6</sup> Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic," 108-9.

<sup>7</sup> My paraphrase of Shabistari's *Gulshan-i Raz*: "he has become pure from Self as flame from smoke," cited in Margaret Smith, *Rabia the Mystic, A.D. 717-801, and her Fellow-Saints in Islam* (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1928), 20.

<sup>8</sup> Matsuo Basho, *Narrow Road to the Interior*, Boston, MA: Shambala, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), 115e.

<sup>10</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act II, Scene II, 258-60, in Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, eds., *The Complete Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 750.