

THE PHANTOM MUSE

“The imaginary loss that so obsessively occupies the melancholic tendency has no real object, because its funereal strategy is directed towards the impossible capture of the phantom.” – Giorgio Agamben

PART 1

The Underground

I AM a sick man...I'm a spiteful man. I'm an unattractive man. I think there is something wrong with my liver. I cannot make things before knowing whether I have commenced on the right path, whether, for instance, this idea of beginning with a transcription of *The Underground* is going to work? I have found a place, I have found a time, and I have hit upon an idea that might help to give form to my endless musings and scrawlings. So here I am, 13:20, January...the what? What is the next significant date? First lecture on the 26th, next Thursday. Today is Saturday, right? So that makes...26 minus 1 is Wednesday, 25th, minus two, Tuesday...Can I be bothered to think about this? What difference does the date and time make?...Maybe I should just stare at the river... I'm here...I've found the place and the time...like I did in Montpelier last summer...when I wrote in the notebook about not needing to write once you had found the time and the space to write, that perhaps that is all the work, this finding of time and space.

When I thought that I imagined myself in a video-play, like something Beckett might have made. My interior

monologue was an audio voice-over. The image-track was myself, there and then, in the Bar Le Lion. I wrote the scenario down in the notebook before me.

A few hours later I was sitting at an outdoor terrace in the afternoon sun before the cathedral. The bells were ringing as I imagined a second part to this imaginary video-play, one in which a second character was writing and thinking the same thoughts in a different place and time.

I realised I had lost the notebook a few days later, on my way to somewhere else. So I bought a new one and tried to recount the video-play scenario as I had written it a week earlier, knowing as I did that some inessential thing would now be lost. Even if the words I write now are exactly the same as the others I wrote then, this pointless thing would still be gone.

Here is what I wrote:

Sketch for Video-Play Two locations/One figure

Location one: Café, morning sunlight, indoors.

A figure sits at a table. It has before it a cup of coffee, a notebook, a pen and the remains of a Danish pastry. Sunlight enters the space from outside. The passing traffic cuts exquisite crystalline shadows across the tables and walls. On the back wall there is the face of a lion. The figure sits and stares at the patterns, motionless. An interior monologue begins on the audio-track.

“...ranting repetitive refusal...ranting repetitive refusal...ranting repetitive refusal...”

There is a pause. Light passes over the tables and walls. Cut to the open notebook. Shadows pass over it. Nothing is written.

“...ranting repetitive refusal...ranting repetitive refusal...ranting repetitive refusal...”

Close up on the back of the figures head. Cut to the lion's face.

“ranting, repetitive refusal...ranting repetitive refusal”

Another pause. Shot of figure in medium profile.

“Ranting repetitive refusal ranting repetitive refusal... [pause]...nice rhythm...ranting...repetitive...nice just thinking...ranting repeating... [pause]...that's it...maybe that's it...just this...[pause]...light...moving images...and just thinking...that's it...maybe that's it...Why should I record any of this? Who says I have to put this into words...that it has to take form? Is this not enough? Just thinking...I'm here...I've found the place and the time...why should I do anything other than be here... just thinking what I'm thinking, feeling what I'm feeling...the warmth of the sun, the pleasure of the light images passing through my eyes, the thought of sight, the feeling of seeing, now, seeing this,...and the taste of the coffee...and this thinking...yes, this thinking...just this thinking...these words in my head...just me here, thinking...seeing...not doing...no, not doing...no need to do...all these sounds...chatter...cars passing...drones of all kinds...crackles, hisses and clicks...I have it all here...I have my own personal art inside...it's all here... my imaginary art...all here, in me, now...the best art anyone could have... Why would anyone need to make anything? It's all here...this is it... as real as anything...as good as...no, BETTER than all that artifice...All you need is to know how to find the time and the space to think, to just let yourself be inside itself, let yourself be your own art, here and now...if they knew this they would never have to make art again...”

A hand strokes the surface of a page.

“I could write ‘The light passes over the tables and walls’...I could write ‘If they knew this they would never have to make art again’...or I could just watch the light passing over the tables and wall...just these moving images... just me here, thinking...seeing...not doing...no,

not doing...no need to do...'

The figure picks up the pen and pulls off the cap with its teeth. Cut back to the light playing across the face of the lion.

The figure puts the tip of the pen to the surface of the page and starts to write:

'A substantial period of concentration and attention is required to complete a coherent piece of writing. There are too many procrastinatory channels that distract one from finding sufficient time to compose a coherent work, to imaginatively evolve a poetic form, to allow a shape to come. I do not create enough time for this to happen. There are only ever these fragments, titles for virtual poems and for the as yet unwritten sections of imaginary essays, ...temporal, passing thoughts, sketched poorly, in haste. The writing cannot orientate itself towards wholeness. It wants to but it cannot. Sometimes there are only the lists, like:

Once Chance out between Two Worlds

Different types of Drifts and Speeds

The Scriptural

Falling into the Wrong Hands

Bedsides

Shield Killers

The Phantom Crowd of Words

Taint and Stain

Crisis-proof Form

Cracked Shelves

Lazy Idol Time

Immediate Feeling

Waylaid by Laughter

Ticking Bugs

Base Communicant

Theoretical Relationships Through the Ages

Systematic Extermination

Forest of Mikes
Infanticide
Phantasmatic Traumagenics

Something inside the inspiration refuses to be captured in form. These titles are all that remain of it. That which is directing the text is that around which it is drawn, the empty spaces around which the currents are forced to flow. The whole towards which the writing aspires is the thing that keeps leading it astray.

This thing that walks through walls, reads between lines, crosses the margins between books, this distracting thing of intersections I have come to call the Phantom Muse.

It is just a fantasy that has entered my head, and whatever happens I want to make it come alive.

It seems I have come to seek a substitute for intention (and the promise of form) in this false phantom.

This is what the whole thing's about.'

The Underground

Both the author of the notes and Notes themselves are, of course, fictional. Nevertheless, types such as the creator of these notes not only could, but are also bound to exist in our society.

I wanted, among other things, to present to the public, in a more striking manner than usual, the story of a man whose mind is constantly de-railed while reading passages in books. This man is slowly coming to realise that he can no longer 'complete' a book. The older he grows the shorter become the books he reads. He no longer understands what it means to have read something. Today he can barely complete a chapter.

It is as if the private text of his own thoughts insisted on the attention he would, in the past, have given

over to understanding the text at hand. He trips over his thoughts in the middle of paragraphs, his attention diverted by ideas that snag the text in himself, that draw thought into its blissfully blank margins, lead it along lines of parenthetical, associational slippage, luring him into the formless matrix of a personal-memorial archive that is slowly disintegrating.

The story he intended was about writing, words, memory and signs. It wanted to tell you something about how writing works on thought, about how the desire to put feelings into words is simultaneously promised and betrayed by Phantom Muse. It wants to know as much as it wants you to know. It wants to tell you something about desire and art, love and loss...and the will to form. But as the text keeps shifting from word to image the narrative keeps getting derailed, it keeps flicking back, jumping registers, tracks. There is no core, as there is no form. An interruptive drift picks up momentum shunting the parenthesis further and further from the original line of thought and its inspiration.

At the moment of decisive impulsion to make a note he is no longer in the place of the text. "When is the time of this thought that I note?" he asks himself after noting that *the cushion of intellectual memory is built upon the traces of trauma*.

It is something that happens when he reads a text and decides that this or that line is worth noting. He underlines, makes a note in the margin. He makes a note *to the future*.

"What is the right word to describe this state of hovering, as one underlines and makes a note in the margin, the space of being between the consciousness of this text here and that other text that is not yet? And what difference would the right word make to anything?"

Consciousness has shifted register from the here-and-now of the immediate text to the then-and-there of some indefinite future time, of some indefinite future 'work',

an already pre-figured portent of his ultimate non-being.

At the moment a future-oriented ego takes form in his imagination, as the writing assumes the mantle of meaningful interest to others...at that instant, or rather shortly afterwards, the murderous side of his intellect steps up and raises the knife.

It is in this peculiar intermediate space of consciousness, between the being-here-present of the text being read and the being-elsewhere that occurs when a line or idea activates his personal network of significant concerns that he finds himself temporally absented. The meta-note connects/overarches the actual text and its psycho-mnemonic location. This is where the phantasm of the memorial ground resides, between = and : in the space of annotation, in the act of thinking about what links the text to his personal network of significant concerns, co-ordinating the fixed clusters of associations that trail in the wake of the Phantom Muse. In this sense the particularity of the textual source is subsumed within the generality of a personal mental process, the singularity of the being-here-read author and the text dissolves into the generality of this personal network, one that has no one at its centre capable of generating a line of enquiry, a line of poetry, a line of sustained reasoning any further than the margin.

I swear to you gentlemen, to be conscious is an illness, a genuine full-blown illness.

You probably think I'm trying to make you laugh? You're mistaken in that too. I'm not really the cheerful person I seem, or may perhaps seem, to you; however, if all the chatter is irritating you (I can already sense that you are irritated), why don't you ask me precisely who I am? I can't tell you that. I can only I'll tell you *where* 'I' am not.

I am not in the involuntary and pleasurable shift from 'I' to 'we'. I am not in the future nor in the Lure of Posterity. I am not in the fantasy that an audience will be

attentively following these lines of words.

This is the delusional projection of the would-be author, the underground man. How could he know how a reader will react to his words? Why does he even assume that there will be a reader? In order to write must one assume the existence of this future reader, this imaginary communicant? It is here, in this question, that the promise of a reason and a form to the writing resides, here where the Phantom Muse coincides with the Lure of Posterity and the Lost Object of Desire.

But here there is only a fractured mosaic of memorial attractors, holding the info-scapes in place, drawing thought into their orbits, like the imaginary lovers to whom one's words are ultimately and hopelessly addressed, ghosts like one's self, recordings of silence, the sum of all the gaps in the tape...

If I'm addressing readers then it's quite simply for show, because it makes it easier to write. This is mere form, empty form.

But there's something else too: why, exactly do I wish to write? If it's not for the public, then wouldn't it be possible to remember it all in my head my head without transferring it to paper?

Quite so; but on paper it comes across more majestically. There's something inspirational about it, one is a stricter judge of oneself, it adds to the style. Moreover: perhaps I genuinely get comfort from writing. Just today, for instance, I am particularly oppressed by one very old memory. It came to my mind very clearly just the other day and since then it hasn't left me, like an irritating musical motif that gets stuck.

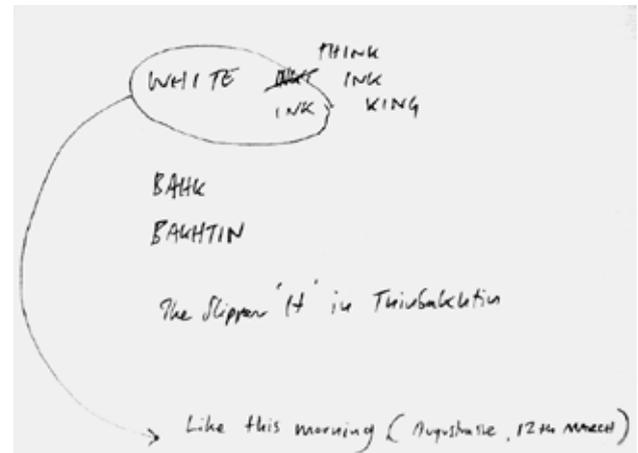
It transports me to the racecourse where my father wrote the names of horses on the last of the hand-written tipster boards. As the dementia slowly began to decompose his memory he was becoming a distinctly Beckett-like character. It was the repetitions, the habits, the temporal patterns that have come to characterise the whole

of the man, all that is left as the inessential details of his everyday life gradually slip away, that evoke a solitary player like Krapp.

In what he can remember of the recording his father is smiling as he walks through the margins of outer and inner space towards a swirling swarm of references that cluster at the site like the occult roots of the Cantos

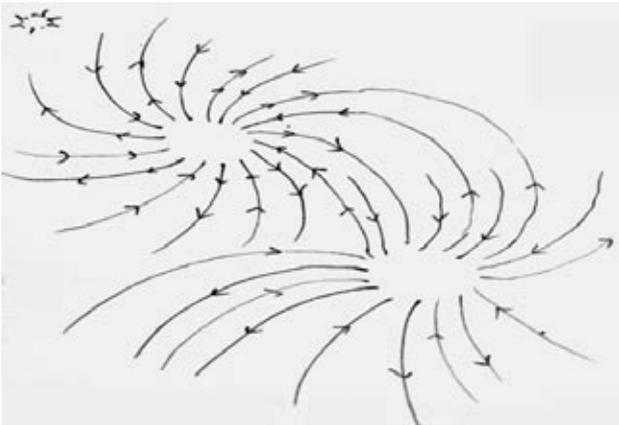
Gambling in the General Economy
The Keyboard of 'Correspondences'
The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness
L'Abeé C
Spleen and Ideal
The Shining Twins
Blood and Guts in High School

Notes from Underground
Thinkingking



mixing the milk with weiss – fleish – fresch
 frische – wollmilch
 Fresh – Flesh – Weiss – Milch
 Flesh Vice Weiss Fleisch
 Fleisch Weiss
 ()

some form of prismatic
 of Paranoiac Hyperconnectivity
 homing in on the mechanisms
 of Benjamin's Jetszeit



Yellow Vinyl
 recording surface
 [Vanilla Sky]

A Scanner Darkly Eternal Sunshine

Concerning the River Bank

“One of the central postulates – the third tier – is that upon the semiotic collision with the ‘rent’ or ‘abyss’ in place of the foreclosed signifier (the signifier of the Name-of-the-Father), the signifying structure of the latent psychotic shatters, and the connection to the Øther (as barred Other) breaks. To the extent that the link with the Øther is severed, there are no ‘real’ others; only ‘fleeting-improvised-men,’ or evanescent elements of Schreber’s shattered signifying structure. With Schreber’s signifying structure quite literally in pieces, there is no longer a master signifier, a *point de capiton* to ‘secure’ his position in the world (existentially speaking). As such, he occupies various places (various identities) via the continual recombination (the *glissement*) of these signifying fragments. Insofar as there is nothing to ‘hold the world in place,’ Schreber and his ‘universe’ continually shift in a kaleidoscopic manner. Moreover, to the extent that his signifying structure shatters, where his signifying elements (or clusters) exist as orphaned fragments, they can be reconnected with almost limitless variation. ‘Almost,’ because again in Schreber’s case (and as I will argue), the semiotic architecture of his delusional ‘reconstruction’ is largely dependent upon the relation between the foreclosed signifier and its substitute”
 –Janet Lucas, *The Semiotics of Schreber’s Memoires*

In every man’s memory there are things which he does not divulge to everyone, but really only to friends. And then there are those things which he doesn’t even divulge to friends, but only really to himself, and then as a secret. And finally there are those which a man is afraid to divulge even to himself, and every respectable person has accumulated quite a few of these.

Perhaps, as I sit here, it is because I feel like an old lady, like my Grandma, staring from the window. Perhaps it has to do with experiences of empty time, like the times that Virginia Woolf evokes, here and there, a time of waking

from slumber outdoors in late summer afternoons, a time of lazy drifts, a secure time without trepidation, the time of the sleeping child for the mother, the grandmother, a deep remembrance of that time before things had names, a time of sounds, smells, images and touch without meaning.

In the space of infantile well-being, where one experiences the flow of time as pure unfolding *durée*, one is shielded from trauma. The idea of the presence of grandma is the personification and literal embodiment of the shield.

But as soon as I think about writing anything waves of debilitating anxiety flow through me. Sometimes the nervous energies that pass through my body are incapacitating. I'm not receiving any treatment, nor have I ever done, although I do respect medicine and doctors. Besides, I'm still extremely superstitious if only in that I respect medicine. (I am sufficiently well educated not to be superstitious, but I am.)

I cannot make head nor tail of my illness and I'm not absolutely certain which part of me is sick. I'm still extremely superstitious especially when I am thoroughly immersed in writing. Then I am more vulnerable than ever to an hysterical, phobic fear bordering on psychosis. Nothing terrifies me more than my own writing.

I am aware of a recurring feeling of dread, of perpetual suspicion, of being tracked by some judgemental fate. I imagine this is the consequence of having been so deeply impressed as a young child by the fear of being caught in a lie. I feel it still. I feel it today. I fear, hysterically, that I will be called before the judges and that my life will be ruined. It is a very clear and distinct guilt reflex inaugurated by the punishing figure of a Telepathic Law. I still think that I can be seen through, that I am transparent, that I could never conceal a secret. It would show all over my face, it would change the way I walk, the tones of my voice, the movements of my eyes. The mechanism is internal now and automated: a perpetual self-scanner surveying my soul for hidden motives, secret duplici-

ties, zones of potentially catastrophic emotional intensity, signs and portents of impending doom, drawing me to the riverbanks, at night.

No, it's not out of spite that I don't want to be cured. But when my thought and understanding seem to be running round in circles, when thought seems unable to clarify or resolve the questions it poses for itself, my urgency reaches out to another, to a communicant, someone to share the mental exacerbation. There are few who perform this function adequately now. Less, and less. What if, in the end, there is only oneself? No communicants, no sustainable imaginary output contexts, no projected audience? In the end, only oneself.

The right-hand wall just turned into an opening, onto a forest, at night, warm...Kronospor is there with two female figures, left and right handed paths...the demological currents...that come through freely with the weed...One path leads to dark and lonely water...she is the suicide spirit, Sylvia-Sirene...she is the one who will make me bleed myself into the river, at night.

You'll probably not see fit to understand this. But I do understand it.

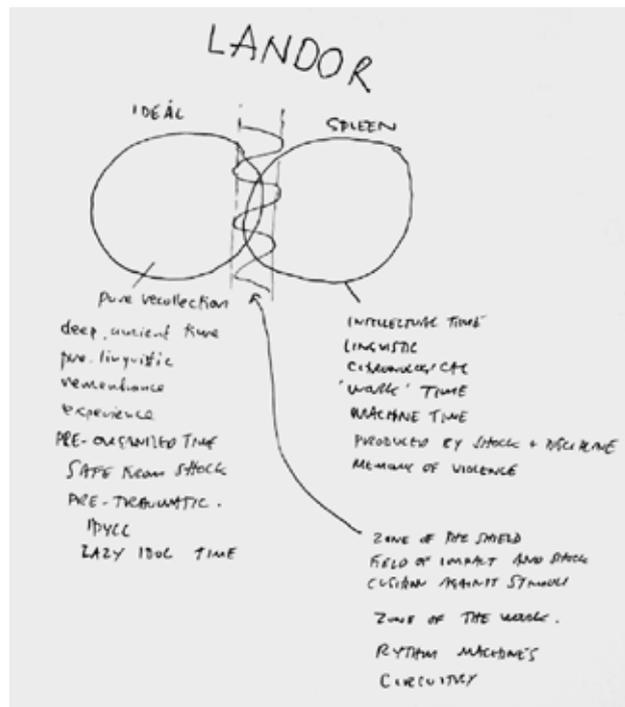
Sylvia-Sirene was raped as a child by a man, near water.
(we have been having) textual relations
etc in time

On the other hand...the path leads to bank of lilac flowers, a meadow flanking a hill which led up to a sports stadium.

Do you remember the dream...it flickered in just now...I told you about it...there was a river below the ground. It had to do with red wine, as if the river was running wine...and it had to do with R...water under the bridge...water running towards oblivion...It made me think about the coincidence of names and graves, of mothers and muses, and the unfinished mourning that leaves a person unfinished, of the seven seas to sadder

shores, of the noon day demon and the angels whose wings The Horrographer butchered, and The Letter to No One. I thought of Ana Mendieta, Sabina Spielrein, of the grave and the womb, the mudder-mutter-matrix, 'i/we womb from which we emerge'. I wrote 'It passes through, it interferes, it makes me do more writing that will never find a home in form'.

So before I am taken again, before I am ultimately taken, I wanted to make public certain understandings of the operations of the writing mind that may have the capacity to short-circuit the terror of this dreadful, paranoiac hyperstition, the demon of poisonous production and the gloomy spirit of dark and lonely waters.



There is a force of necessity, and therefore authority, in the urgency with which we make ourselves remember. But it has pleasure in it too. The pleasure is highest when one remembers in an incantatory mode, as one walks in time. I often find myself repeating certain sequences of words over and over again, as if they were threads that would lead me back to the unremembered.

This urge to recall, to capture, to put into words or images is directly linked to the problem of making or not making art, of giving a form to experience in order that it be communicable. And it is linked to love. But the very intention of art works against the living flow of remembrance as the recovery of the soul. It is as if living memory senses the avarice of artistic intention and resists it.

Words are the elementary form by which remembrance is bound to memory in alphabetic societies. Hence the sense that cutting word lines could liberate pure remembrance. The liberation of remembrance would cure the soul, breath life back into the traumatized reflex machine. In this sense, the urge to communicate in written language works against the restoration of the happy, living soul.

But there is a third mode of memory between the voluntary and pure, one which has the character of rhythm, repetition, automation. Not intellectual as such but rhythmically repetitive, it touches on something deep and childish in oral repetition; songs, nursery rhymes and learning to read by rote.

Like the title of the image of Humboldt Park during the war, framed in a notice board at its entrance. I took the words 'Der Park auf Der Krieg, Der Park auf der Kreig, Der Park auf Der Kreig' and chanted them half-involuntarily to myself like a mantra as I wandered aimlessly through it.

Later I found myself on a railway bridge staring at the tracks.

I waited. I waited for remembrance to float up through

the layers of involuntary, perpetual remembering. But as soon as remembrance flowed into present-being-in-time I had the reflex urge to capture it for recollection. To recollect so as to give to an other, to show to an other, to the imaginary communicant that prefigures an audience, to M, a reader, to you.

A broken typewriter lay in the undergrowth on the side of a disused track. Another involuntary mnemonic started repeating itself in my head “remember recover recollect return remember recover recollect return... remember recover recollect return”. I walked with the words. I kept walking with the words “remember recover recollect return remember recover recollect return remember recover recollect return...” until I found myself on a bank of lilac flowers, a meadow flanking a hill which led up to a sports stadium.

It was here that I imagined things that it would be impossible to describe in words. I was holding the hand of the person I have loved the deepest because she is the only one willing to hold my hand as I remember-perceive-imagine the flowing away of the possibility of my ever loving or being loved. She was standing on the bank of lilac flowers and the breeze was flowing through us both, through time, through both our worlds. I could see in my mind’s eye that I was in two places at once and, at the same time, in neither. Slowly I returned to myself the way the camera arrives at the figure of Kelvin in the opening of Tarkovsky’s *Solaris*, holding hands with a phantasm.

Sketch for Video-Play Two locations/One figure

Location two: Café, afternoon sunlight, outdoor terrace

A figure sits at a table on an open terrace. It has before it a cup of coffee, a notebook, and a pen.

“...ranting repetitive refusal ...ranting repetitive refusal...ranting repetitive refusal...”

There is a pause. The light is brilliant and still on the piazza. Cut to the open notebook. Cathedral bells are ringing the hour.

“Ranting repetitive refusal ranting repetitive refusal... [pause]...nice rhythm...ranting...repetitive...nice just thinking...ranting repeating... [pause]...that’s it...maybe that’s it...just this...[pause]...light...moving images...and just thinking...that’s it...maybe that’s it...Why should I record any of this? Who says I have to put this into words...”

Close up on the back of the figure’s head.

“...‘cut back to the light playing across the face of the lion. Then the eyes, just the eyes’...that was how she came in...you were there...the section from Krapp... that was the link, the trigger...I drew a face in the notebook...two simple eyes and a mouth...it was her... you...the Phantom Muse...God’s Lioness...the one that holds Krapp’s remorse, the one that holds his death in advance...that lost love that promises a hopeless form for his work...“She lay stretched out on the floorboards with her hands under her head and her eyes closed. Sun blazing down, bit of a breeze, water nice and lively. I noticed a scratch on her thigh and asked her how she came by it. Picking gooseberries, she said. *I said again I thought it was hopeless and no good going on, and she agreed, without opening her eyes.* (Pause.) I asked her to look at me and after a few moments – (pause) – after a few moments she did, but the eyes just slits, because of the glare. I bent over her to get them in the shadow and they opened. (Pause. Low.) Let me in. (Pause.)”

The figure puts the tip of the pen to the surface of the page and starts to write:

‘I drew two eyes, a nose and a mouth...that was you... you came to fill that simple, primal form, the face that promises to redeem the grieving soul...the soul bound

by another's death to the river at night... And now I'm here...I was there before...somewhere else...but it's still the same really... what difference does time make...it's all the same time...that's what realising you have the potential for your own art inside you all the time makes you know...time is utterly transparent...there is consciousness of the total artifice that is being here now in time, aware that all perception, when properly honed, is virtually art...and there is not knowing this...which is like being dead while alive...but THIS is precisely not being dead... or rather it's being AWARE that you are in some sense, like everyone else already dead...dead in the future...and this consciousness...of being both here and there now...'

There is, associated with the elation of realizing that our living being is art in itself, a profound melancholic anteriority. All unrecorded moments of time are destined to be lost. All that we have experienced but never rendered will pass away with us. When a person dies their memories die with them. I have been saying to friends of late that I would be happy to spend the rest of my life recollecting what I have already lived, re-playing and recombining the recordings stored in my memorial archive. The idea fills me a sense of exquisite languor. It puts me in an intimate relation to death. I have lived on earth for forty years. I figure myself fortunate to have reached this far. My life has been rich.

You see it doesn't make any difference whether or not I leave.

And so I am going to talk about myself.

All things pass

All will be lost

Why experience more?

There has already been sufficient.