

Eunoia: Beauty or Truth (or What?)

Take Home Exam, Final Question (for Extra Credit): “Eunoia’ is the shortest word in English to contain all five vowels, and the word quite literally means ‘beautiful thinking’ (Eunoia 103). This sentence begins the concluding unscientific postscript to Christian Bök’s remarkable book of verse. Discuss Eunoia as an instance of “beautiful thinking”.

Skip Thomai. Beware the geeks bearing gifts, Perry. That’s a trick question, I’m sure of it-- or tricky anyhow.

Perry Calles. Really? How do you know that?

ST. He’s always going on in class about how we read things and don’t look up the words we don’t know the meaning of, right?

PC. Fucking tiresome.

ST. So when I got the question last night I decided to look up that word eunoia and make sure what it means. And guess what. There’s no such

word in English (or American!). It's not in Murray's OED, it's not in Webster, its not even in Merriam-Webster. What do you think of *that*?!

PC. But it's in Bök's book – it's the epigraph, quoted from that eighteenth-century poem nobody ever read – except maybe Prof the Pedant.

ST. That's the trick. It's "in" that poem *The Triumphs of Temper* by William Hayley but it's only there as a quoted word – and if anybody actually looked at the printed text of the poem they'd see that. It's set off in capital letters -- EUNOIA. And Hayley even tells us that it's a word from a different world.

PC. You found a copy of *The Triumphs of Temper*?

ST. Silly boy. It's on the internet, like everything else. And I did more than that. I went and found where the word comes from. It's Greek. And it doesn't mean "beautiful thinking" at all -- as we'd have known if Bök had just quoted the next line of the passage he gives as his epigraph: "Benevolence the name she bears on earth". Look it up in any Greek dictionary. It means "kindness" or "good will".

PC. But if Hayley quotes the word and Bök lifts it over into his poem, then it's "in English", right? And if Hayley's poem translates EUVOIA first into EUNOIA and then into Benevolence in his poem, why shouldn't Bök translate it to Beautiful Thinking? Especially since he specifies that it means what it means "quite literally". Bök's book only works "quite literally".

ST. Right – and that's the tricky part. EUVOIA first gets to be "the shortest word in English with all five vowels" when it's published in 1780 in *The Triumphs of Temper* under the signs EUNOIA and Benevolence. Then it just starts spreading like a virus through printing after printing of Hayley's poem – there were at least fourteen separate editions published by 1817, and that's only counting the ones issued by the official publisher, Cadell! But through all that the word is only *in* English formally and bibliographically. Not literally, not yet.

PC. Cool. It gets in literally with *Eunoia* where Bök gives it its literal meaning, Beautiful Thinking. In Hayley it gets to mean EUNOIA and Benevolence. Before that it's just, well, EUVOIA. And now Bök's made everybody think it means what he says it means.

ST. Exactly – and presto, Bök starts a new literary movement, “The New Ennui”, announced in what the professor calls Bök’s “concluding unscientific postscript”.

PC. Not so new. It’s just a new name for an old set of tricks. Call it the Humpty Dumpty School.

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean -- neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master -- that's all.”

ST. Interesting. That makes me think Bök went to a different school altogether. Humpty’s school has a headmaster who talks like God Almighty – one of those old types my dad told me about. I think they’re mostly dead now. But the New Ennui is poetry without a personality. It’s beyond even O’Hara’s Personism. It’s pure X-Gen.

PC. *Impure* I’d say. About as far from a Slacker mode as possible: “a Sisyphean spectacle of its labour” that “required seven years of daily

perseverance for its consummation” (*Eunoia* 103, 105). That’s a “New Ennui” alright – grandstanding in Bök’s signature flatland wit. Ennui sending out its coded message: “un oui”.

ST. And there’s more there there than meets the ear. “*Its labour*”, “*its consummation*”. This isn’t Jacob laboring for Rachel to beget all the legitimate children of Israel. It isn’t even Jacob with *all* those wives of his, and all those multiplying offspring he was told to spread around, legitimate and illegitimate. Jacob’s story isn’t part of this story at all. *Eunoia* is poetry as parthogenesis, with Christian Bök as midwife or voyeur. . .

PC. Or star-gazing shepherd?

ST. Whatever. . . and *Eunoia* as Molly Bloom text-messaging to her lovers, her readers: “And yes I said yes I will Yes”. “A paradise of pleasure and ennui”, as another poet of the same kind once wrote.

And it’s not as if Bök hasn’t told us what *Eunoia*’s about, at least in his view. There’s ‘Pataphysics out of Alfred Jarry and OULIPO, and then there’s ”Pataphysics out of bpnichol, Steve McCaffery, Christopher Dewdney and their various “imaginary academies” (*’Pataphysics*, 84): the Toronto Research Group, the Institute for Linguistic Ontogenetics, The ”Pataphysical Hardware Company. Bök’s Canadian ”Pataphysicians are

come to evacuate the illusions of place, time and meaning that were established by the

environmental mythopoiesis of . . . [Northrop] Frye, [Margaret] Atwood, and [Robert] Kroetsch (for whom literature is merely the side effect of a geography – the surreal terrain of a collective unconscious . . . Canadian "Pataphysics opposes such mysticism, treating literature not as a mythopoeic, but as a cyborganic phenomenon.

(*'Pataphysics*, 81).

PC. Huh?

ST. That's really saying something, isn't it!

PC. If you say so.

ST. I don't say so, Bök does in his book *'Pataphysics. The Poetics of an Imaginary Science* (2002), which "reflects the influence of Jarry on my own poetic career" (*'Pataphysics*, 4). Bök writes a narrative of the historical emergence of his work, tracing out his view of procedural writing and the "potential literature" displayed in *Chrystallography* (1994) and *Eunoia* (2001). "To be literary", he says, "is to pose imaginary solutions to problematic formulations" (*'Pataphysics*, 74). The

problematic formulations are the set of arbitrary rules, or constraints, that are established before any text actually unfolds. The constraints are laid down as a kind of scientific hypothesis that, when actually tested out, reveals what Blake called “the infinite which was hid” in the apparently determinate surfaces of things. Not *beneath* the surfaces, as a symbolist or a surrealist view would argue, but within and as the surfaces themselves, which have no meaning beyond themselves. They’re autopoietic phenomena, whose “growth [has] no guerdon/ But only to grow”, as Swinburne argued in his poetic manifesto for a similar view of poetic forms (“Hertha,” 138–139). Taking his cue from Hans Vaihinger, Bök calls this an *as if* writing – a ludic exploration of the “combinatoric potentialities” of alphabetic signs. “The truth of the ludic abides by no belief; instead, such truth is *entertained* as one of many hypothetical alternatives. It is merely a potentiality” (*’Pataphysics*, 73).

PC. So Bök’s *’Pataphysics. The Poetics of an Imaginary Science* is like Poe’s “The Philosophy of Composition”. Poe tells us how to go about writing poetry by telling us how he went about writing “The Raven”. And Bök’s study of ’pataphysical poetics is his critical explanation of *Eunoia*’s “Beautiful Thinking”. Is that right?

ST. Well Bök goes into much greater depth but, essentially, yes – they’re the same kind of critical work. And now that you mention it, they have a

lot more in common than a shared genre. They're both manifestoes for self-conscious procedural writing. "Most writers," Poe impishly says, "poets in especial -- prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy -- an ecstatic intuition". Not Poe. On the contrary, his essay lays out "step by step, the processes by which . . . one of his compositions attained its ultimate point of completion" (Poe, 14). Note that "*its* completion"! And remember "The New Ennui": "*its* labour", "*its* consummation"! Poe is writing what Bök calls "lucid writing" about a poetics of lucid writing, which "does not concern itself with the transparent transmission of a message. . .[but] with the exploratory examination of its own pattern" (*'Pataphysics*, 4). For both Poe and Bök, "What is at stake is the status of poetry in a world of science" (*'Pataphysics*, 12).

PC. True. But not true enough. Bök's "survey" of procedural writing continually stresses its "ludic" character. And that description would rhyme well with Poe's outrageously witty essay except for one thing: Bök's book, unlike Poe's essay, is about as far from a ludic performance as one could imagine. Look at this passage, for instance - and it's entirely characteristic.

Imaginary academies such as these all imply that the mythic desire for cultural essences can only reinforce the metaphysical theorization of an

imperial paradigm. . . . All theories in effect subordinate thought to the nomic instrumentation of a royal science, whereas research coordinates thought through the ludic experimentalism of a nomad science. For the research of such imaginary academies, language itself represents a cyborganic phenomenon, in which every text becomes a poetic device, a novel brand of “book-machine”, whose virologic mechanism uses us more than we use it.

(*Pataphysics*, 84).

Now if that particular text had become a poetic device we'd have no problem with it. The high-falutin parallel of “the nomic instrumentation of a royal science” (bad, bad!) with “the ludic experimentalism of a nomad science” (Look! We have come through!) isn't ludic, it's pretentious -- ludicrous. *Unbeautiful* thinking. How it ever turned into *Eunoia* is a miracle of rare device.

ST. Does ludic writing in this mode have to be funny?

PC. No, but it does have to be *lucid* in Bök's (and Poe's) special sense: it has to make a literal demonstration of its argument. Beautiful thinking has to be thinking realized at the aesthetic level – thinking as an artifice of style and formal procedures. That would be what *Eunoia* does and what Bök's critical book – quite unlike Poe's essay – doesn't do. And

Eunoia does it throughout the book – even in the witty preface that comes into the book as a postscript, like Walter Scott’s last chapter to his great experimental fiction *Waverley*.

So you’re right to point out Bök’s sly use of the pronoun “it” in “The New Ennui”. That’s what I call ludic and lucid. Or look how he plays with the convention of an “Acknowledgments”: “Special thanks to Darren Weschler–Henry (who drove the car while I read Perec), and special thanks to Natalie Caple (who let me work while she slept)” (105). There they are, what every poet needs: a poetic guide and attendant spirit, on one hand, and the Muse on the other. Darren Weschler–Henry as Virgil, with (just perhaps) a side glance at the car in Cocteau’s *Orphée*; and Natalie Caple as Sleeping Beauty, a Blessed Damozel in oneiric touch with the regions of imaginative potential being implemented by the super-conscious and determined poet.

ST. Beautiful thoughts! You’ll be writing them up for that extra-credit exam question I suppose.

PC. What else? We want to be practical about this beauty thing, right?. So to answer the question we’ll show how *Eunoia* argues that *there are no ideas but in beautiful things*. Tell me *that idea* won’t score with Herr Professor!

ST. Which means we'll have to show how it constructs its arguments not logically but aesthetically. "Quite literally".

PC. Quite.

ST. So why not start by reading the bibliographical object published by Coach House Press – that *ding an sich*? Like the different verses in the book, *it* has a voice (as it were) too. Its cover is a speaking image and so is its frontispiece, but they address us in nonalphabetic languages. The book then comes to our aid, explaining the visible language of those premonitions:

COVER IMAGE. "Of Yellow" is a polychromatic transcription of the sonnet "Voyelle" by Arthur Rimbaud. Vowels have been replaced with blocks of colour according to the schema described in the sonnet itself: "*A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu: voyelles*". All other letters, commas, and spaces are grey. . . .

FRONTISPIECE. "Vowels Swivel" is a nested set of transparent geometric solids (each one generated by rotating a given vowel around a vertical axis: A (cone); E (cylinder); I (line); O (sphere); U (paraboloid).

(*Eunoia*, unpaginated back matter)

The title page identifies Bök as the “author” of the book’s verses, but who has authored this text? Or who is the agent responsible for the cover and frontispiece? Anonymous? Not at all. *It is*. The book speaks for itself.

PC. So it does, and in more ways than your quotation meets the mind.

Here’s how it *actually* – “quite literally” – meets the eye reading the book:

COVER IMAGE. “Of Yellow” is a polychromatic transcription of the sonnet “Voyelle” by Arthur Rimbaud. Vowels have been replaced with blocks of colour according to the schema described in the sonnet itself: “*A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu: voyelles*”. All other letters, commas, and spaces are grey. The image has appeared on the cover of *Sulfur* 44 (Spring 1999).

FRONTISPIECE. “Vowels Swivel” is a nested set of transparent geometric solids (each one generated by rotating a given vowel around a vertical axis: A (cone); E (cylinder); I (line); O (sphere); U (paraboloid).

And that layout is important – as deliberate as Poe’s ideas about a philosophical poetic method. Because it rhymes exactly with the

deliberated layout of the book's other prose-poetic texts: "Eunoia", "Emended Excess", and "The New Ennui". These too are left and right justified into blocks of text, with the units of "Eunoia" and "Emended Excess" having the additional constraint of a set number of lines for each integral unit, with one unit printed on each page. "Emended Excess" is laid out in blocks of eleven lines while the individual letter sections of "Eunoia" have, respectively, twelve (A), eleven (E), eleven (I), thirteen (O), and twelve (U) lines. So the first unit of "Chapter E" begins:

Enfettered, these sentences repress free speech. The text deletes selected letters. We see the revered exegete reject metred verse: the sestet, the tercet – even *les scènes élevées en grec*. He rebels. He sets new precedents. He lets cleverness exceed decent levels. He eschews the esteemed genres, the expected themes – even *les belles lettres en vers*. He prefers the perverse French esthetes:

and so forth. And note how the procedural rule leads this literal being to assume a kind of life of its own. "The text", we learn, is itself an agent of its own evolving self. And "the revered exegete"? Is this another name for "The text" acting as its own procedural interpreter? And that "We", -- who is that? The reader? Other textual agents who are observing the action as it unfolds? Or the "He"? That surely *is* "The text" repressing

free, spontaneous speech, deleting letters, rejecting metred verse and taking sides with those perverse aesthetic frogs.

ST. “The book speaks for itself.” That’s good. And it does because it “moans round with many voices”, nearly all of them *not* Christian Bök’s. He speaks *in propria persona* only in “The New Ennui”, and even there he appears as only one agent in a much larger textual event and experience. Hassan Abd Al-Hassad, the central character in Section A of “Eunoia”, is in certain obvious ways an even more prominent agent.

PC. A poetical character from a recognizable gene pool: Childe Harold or Sordello or Prufrock or Berryman’s Henry or the implicit human agents in Hejinian’s *My Life* or Howe’s *Pythagorean Silence*. Or Jarry’s Ubu.

ST. Well yes, but a more specific sub-type. And Ubu’s relation to Section U shows the difference. The Ubu character there is a derivative function of Jarry’s Ubu – not at all the latter, but what the latter might become. He is a heretofore unrealized set of Ubuist possibilities – if Ubu were constrained to become even less human, even more literal, than Jarry’s Ubu. So even Jarry’s Ubu – or Djuna Barnes’s Ryder -- are too human. Hassan’s closest relatives would be Stevens’s Crispin or the Chieftan Iffucan of Azcan or the Queen in Laura Riding’s poetic tales.

PC. Or Serena in Hayley's *The Triumphs of Temper!*

ST. Right. But again the comparisons fall short. Like the Ubu of Section U, Hassan is a name that turns from a name to a word, and having made that turn it turns to other words (in another sense) to discover its secret lives: "Hassan can start a war"; "Hassan can watch aghast as databanks at NASDAQ graph hard data and chart a NASDAQ crash." Hassan can grab, want, watch, rant, talk, canvass, and gag. He has lots of capabilities. He also actually *does* things: "Hassan balks at all sacral tasks" and "drafts a Magna Charta" . And while we might have learned that he could clasp, jab, grab, pack, stand, and stalk – among other things – here Hassan doesn't, though all of these acts and many more come to pass in his orbit. If Hassan is a purely potential figure, he's quite specific – indeed, unique – in eunoian actuality. A world lies before him, where to *choose*.

PC. But of course Hassan doesn't do the choosing. Christian Bök does.

ST. But of course. But then who is Christian, what is he, that heaven itself commends him here through the sublime court of *The Triumphs of Temper?* In Section O, the key generating word is "who", as "can" is the key word in Section A (and as sub-semantic guttural forms generate Section U). So "who" is the form assumed by the deliberating Christian Bök in Section O, and who rapidly metastasizes into profs, dons, monks,

God, blond trollops and blond showfolk, snobs, Moors from Morocco, cooks, crooks, Goths, and so forth. Christian Bök becomes barely a face in the Hugolian crowd, a kind of disappearing Baudelairean god. *Eunoia* is a critical reflection on the idea of identity – and a revelation of what Blake called “The will of the Immortal” that has always existed, before there were any gods, and after they have gone:

Earth was not: nor globes of attraction
The will of the Immortal expanded
Or contracted his all flexible senses.
Death was not, but eternal life sprung.

(The Book of Urizen Chap. II. 1–4)

PC. An extremely beautiful thought.

ST. I'm thinking Prof will think so too. He's a flaming anti-theist!

PC. He's also as perverse as those “French esthetes” in Section E. So we really have to nail this argument down. And Section I is the way to go! It begins in an aggressive first person:

Writing is inhibiting. Sighing, I sit, scribbling in ink
this pidgin script. I sing with nihilistic witticism,

disciplining signs with trifling gimmicks – impish hijinks which highlight stick sigils. Isn't it glib? Isn't it chic? I fit childish insights within rigid limits, writing shtick which might instill priggish misgivings in critics blind with hindsight. I dismiss nit-picking criticism which flirts with philistinism. I bitch; I kibitz – griping whilst criticizing dimwits, sniping whilst indicting nitwits, dismissing simplistic thinking, in which phillipic wit is still illicit.

But this first person is an impish hijink, though we don't perhaps see that right away. I soldier on through the unfolding stanzas: "I pitch in, fixing things. I rig this/ winch with its wiring"; "Hiking in British districts, I hike"; "Fishing till twilight, I sit, drifting in this birch skiff". But as we read we wonder about the what and where and who of this stick sigil: "Which/ blind spirit is whining in this whistling din?" Is it a "blind witch. . . midwifing its misbirth"? These beautiful questions we might have posed ourselves! But I is there before us, leading us on. "Is it this / thin, sickish girl [and who would that be? The blind witch?], twitching in fits, whilst writing/ things in spirit-writing? If it isn't – it is I; it is I. . ." And through it all our old friend *it* is back suggesting –yikes! -- that "it is I".

But the piece of resistance is saved for the end, I's last stand:

Thinking within strict limits is stifling. Whilst Viking Knights fight griffins, I skirmish with this riddling Sphinx (this sigil – I). I print lists, filing things (kin with kin, ilk with ilk), inscribing this distinct sign, listing things in which its imprint is intrinsic. I find its missing links, divining its implicit tricks. I find it whilst skin-diving in Fiji; I find it whilst picknicking in Linz. I find it in Inniskillin; I find it in Mississippi. I find it whilst skiing in Minsk. (Is this intimism civilizing if Klimpt limns it, if Liszt lilt it?) I sigh, I lisp. I finish writing this writ, signing it, kind sir: NIHIL DICIT, FINI.

The opening sentences recall nothing so much as Borges' essay (or is it a story?), "Borges and I": "I skirmish with this riddling/ Sphinx (this sigil – I)."

ST. Or Hollander's *Reflections on Espionage?* Or some of Merrill's early poems – like "Mirror" or "Charles on Fire".

PC. Sure. Beautiful thinking is often a world of mirrors and codes. Here it is Nothing that speaks, a first person (major man!) we can watch disappearing in the case ending of another language. Most beautiful of all, we can watch it appearing as well, and at the same time, in the poetic

form summoned at this end of Section I: that special kind of “riddling Sphinx” known as the Enigma. “I find it whilst skin-diving in Fiji; I find it whilst picknicking in Linz. I find it in Inniskillin; I find it in Mississippi. I find it whilst skiing in Minsk.” Another “Enigma on the Letter I”, mirroring – recollecting – those (once) famous lines of Catherine Fanshawe:

I am not in youth, nor in manhood or age,
But in infancy ever am known.

I’m a stranger alike to the fool and the sage,
And though I’m distinguished on history’s page,
I always am greatest alone.

I’m not in the earth, nor the sun, nor the moon;
You may search all the sky, I’m not there;
In the morning and evening, though not in the noon,
You may plainly perceive me, for, like a balloon,
I am always suspended in air.

Though disease may possess me, and sickness, and pain,
I am never in sorrow or gloom.

Though in wit and in wisdom I equally reign,
I’m the heart of all sin, and have long lived in vain,

Yet I ne'er shall be found in the tomb.

The comic will of the Immortal – that eternal life should spring. It's a beautiful way of thinking, and "Benevolence [is] the name she bears on earth".

ST. But of course it *is* only all autopoietic. I think of Tennyson, who published a very similar book in 1830 called *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*. His friend Arthur Hallam then wrote a brilliant study of that book and its "poetry of sensation". His main point was that Tennyson's verse created a drama of a mind thinking through images and prosody. Another friend, Richard Trench, read it the same way but while Hallam was wild with no regret at what Tennyson was doing, Trench came to a rather different conclusion: "Tennyson, " he said, "we cannot live in art".

PC. We're not talking about living, we're talking about thinking.

ST. But Trench's idea is that if the thinking in the poem is only a literal or aesthetic drama, what will we have except the shop-talk of a Bohemian or an Uptown Grub Street?

ST. Do poems think? I don't *think* so! They're like computers -- prosthetic devices. They're magic mirrors we hold up to help us think more clearly about things that matter.

PC. Like the wrath of Achilles say? Section E of *Eunoia* parodies the *Iliad*, thinking about it not as the narrative of a brutal, heroic society, but as a certain set of deployable signs.

ST. A travesty.

PC. Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear triumph in their travesties. So does Byron, so does Shakespeare. Give me a fucking *break!*

ST. Fair enough. Besides, it's not as if *Eunoia* doesn't include itself in its art of sinking. Or us. "Isn't it glib? Isn't it chic?" I suppose I'm one of those "critics blind with hindsight" - who *didn't* take courses from the Yale School these past 50 years?! And then there's . . . who? I? It? Hassan? Somebody anyhow - why not the cyborganic (posthuman?) Christian Bök, working away to "fit childish insights within rigid limits, writing shtick".

PC. "Childish insights"!! The gloss on that would be the Christian's: "Unless you become again as little children you shall not enter the

kingdom of heaven”. So here we have a whole new set of Christian games. And “shtick” tells us what kind they are: “shtick”, Yiddish from the German Stück, meaning “piece”. This Bökian book is *all* of a piece because it communicates in pieces, forcing us to look away from words as referential signs and consider them as physical things made up of pieces and parts that can be shifted about and re-arranged. The block formalities of the stanzas of “Eunoia” inflect the work arithmetically and geometrically. We count the lines per unit and the units per section because we *have* to if we’re to read it. But when we’ve done that we aren’t delivered over to a hermeneutic “meaning”, we simply see the work and its parts more clearly. Or look at – *look* at! – the poem “Vowels”.

loveless vessels

we vow

solo love

we see

love solve loss

else we see

love sow woe

selves we woo

we lose

losses we levee

we owe

we sell

loose vows

so we love

less well

so low

so level

wolves evolve

The anonymous explicator of the Cover Image points out how Rimbaud's thought about the expressive equivalence of vowels and colors can be, has been, realized. And then the book's frontispiece carries the idea further, showing that they (might) have geometric shapes too. And then

comes this anagrammaton “Vowels”, breaking “every letter in the title” (*Eunoia* 104) into pieces to produce ten new permutations. Each of these emerge as distinct piecemeal units.

ST. But the real piece of insistence here is this larger coherent thing, this “poem, which unfolds as another piece of language now arranging itself, as if by some Brownian poetic law, at a different scale. The poem is “quite literally” a Mandelbrot set. And wildly wonderful as “Vowels” is, look at the text titled “W”. Talk about “childish games”!

It is the V you double, not the U, as if to use
two valleys in a valise is to savvy the vacuum
of a vowel at a powwow in between sawteeth.

You have to read this with your eyes and ears. “V you double” begins the game, putting out a signal we must read as three letters, the V, the U, and the double-U made by doubling the V. And this letter, this W, is a form of two U’s to be used (for instance) as if one imagined a valise with two slots (a W form) as two valleys – and to make that imagining in order to gain some procedural opportunities. You (U) might double the form as “valleys” and “valise”, or you might see “the vacuum of a vowel” in any carefully observed W, an absent vowel imaginable between the W’s two v forms, a vowel imaginably gone because – as when two W’s get together

to powwow – the letter’s *sawteeth* can be *seen*.

Then each stanza of the text develops various permutations being imagined for the letter W. The last is particularly delicious:

It is the name for an X whose V does not view
the surface of a lake but the mirror on a wall,
where U & you become a tautonym, a continuum.

There’s a riddle to be solved: “When is W “the name for an X”? Answer: W is the name for an X when we don’t see the letter as two v’s standing atop each other – that letter would be, as it were, a reflection of a v on the shore of a lake – but as a letter formed of two adjacent v’s, each a mirror image of the other. And *seeing* that, *think* of the implications! In this letterspace we glimpse the possibility of an indefinitely extensive system of interchangeable signs. “U & you” become equivalent, each a figure of the other and signaled as such by the visible figure – the sign – of their equivalence: not the word “and” but the sign of that word, the ampersand. In aesthetic thinking like that, to encounter a word like “continuum” is to be able to see in its literal form a sign that we *are* the forms by which we try to reflect on ourselves and know who we are.

PC. Kick-Ass, man. If that’s not an A I’m not an anthromorph.
