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Consider now a man and his wife in a New England village, where the only things available to them are the various sets of relationships that the village makes possible. One learns the proximity and ubiquity of death. I should have said the man and the woman learn these things, or they learn a fundamental instance of a phenomenon called death. Why walk around this word? Why not acknowledge that this text relies upon a fundamental insistence that would make no sense to the movement begun through a questioning that never finds its center apart from an implied absence? That point throws us into contradiction.

Can a book be about death? Can we find a grounding for an experience that is beyond us? Can we make that experience speak in revelatory fashion about contingent experiences? It would seem that introducing that impulse, as I have called it, would do away with the necessity in experiential exploration, make us sit fascinated by an operation we can neither initiate nor control.

What does it mean to initiate death? We sit with a particular provocation. We cannot simply mean that we cannot bring death about, our own or that of another human, or that of any material being, or that of any substantial or insubstantial complex. There, at the end, we have an evasion. We scoot around the suggestion of being by suggesting an epistemological complexity. For we know that, in speaking of these various forms of possible deaths, we cannot say what constitutes death in each case. And we cannot proceed as though death in one domain meant the same thing in the next domain, or even had the same meaning on a subsequent occurrence that obtained on a previous occurrence within the same domain. Put it simply. Can the old guy dying in the green house at the head of the street be treated intellectually or emotionally as we would treat with

the middle-aged woman who expired in the white house next to his? What shall we say, to continue in perplexity, of the porcupines I dispatched in Hamilton's barn? What manner of deaths are these?

If we think at all about this matter, we have to acknowledge that we cannot mean the same emotional and intellectual engagement in every death we encounter. That becomes apparent at its most trivial level when we think of individual deaths. We respond at a different depth to the death of someone with whom we have been familiar, talked with, lived with, perhaps loved. We need not go to any extraordinary level of intimacy to find that we are moved by a particular death.

Why should this be so? I think the answer, or a part of the answer, lies in the imaginative weight we bring to bear on a particular death. Put crudely, at this point, death engages our imagination, and the imagination becomes a function in the process of a particular death. We have, at that moment, learned to escape abstraction and obscurity through an imaginative realization of a singular moment. This death we confront at this moment cannot be any other death we have encountered; we fall out of our conceptual habit. We cannot in this case appeal to conceptualization. I almost said to memory. You might think that you could call upon memory. Calling upon memory might seem an appeal to experience. Certainly, even the innocent can appeal to experience; certainly, even those with a small fund of experience have imagination. And we almost have to argue that that escape from abstraction and obscurity relies upon an imaginative apprehension that one acquires without effort.

That last assertion makes us uneasy. Imagination cannot come without effort. Nor can we simply dispense with the obscurity that surrounds any particular death. We work very hard to avoid a definition, specifying the properties of death, doing

away with that salutary obscurity that surrounds us. It would seem that we hold onto the obscurity because it makes imagination possible; we can speak, almost as though we had become theologians, of justification. That has a nice bell to it: the justified imagination.

What does it mean? How are we to effect passage into other domains where other forms of death reside? We have to move toward understanding, toward a myriad of forms of understanding what constitutes vitality—long before we ever come to terms with death. Classicists have sought to instruct us about the necessary preparation for life's ending. We find these essays comforting, say, at most, but we are left with a nagging sense of ineptitude, of misapprehension, misconception and inadequacy. I have spent some recent time burrowing among the biologists. Population is on my mind, the uniqueness of everything in the organic world. A classicist becomes much too essentialist for this turbulent mind. Now, who's at fault—the classicist, or the one who has set himself the task of making sense of the variability and creative depth of death? So the question might not be how does one prepare for death, or even how does one live, or prepare the dignity of a specific departure. The question rises to face us again. What do we do when we die? When can we say that we have accomplished our death? When does that transformation of consciousness occur? And of what are we conscious?

We get into trouble here because we think we have to admit that consciousness is just about all that we have of death. But consciousness of that singular event appears to be just what we do not have. We might find it absurd to say that we cannot see or recognize a lifeless body. The porcupine I have just hammered with my twelve-gauge is most dead. The hollow tree that no longer puts forth its leaves has died. My father, lying in his

casket, has expired. We have thorough evidence of life's withdrawal wherever we turn; we have countless ways of expressing this recognition. What we recognize is the cessation of a process. Yet there we have another problem. Can we speak of death, too, as a process? When can we say that that process has ceased? Need we say that the process has stopped? Is this all that we can mean by the consciousness of death?

I find myself becoming too ingenious with regard to the complexity that a certain form of experience asks, and threaten to become a ventriloquist, a magician adept at divining the physical language of objects and other forms of being. No measure of experience can ever give me insight into the developmental contingency of a wren or a white-tailed deer. Nothing will inform me of a possible sentience and consciousness in an uprooted oak. Have we created a functional or an interpretive problem for ourselves by this pretense of applying a singularly inexact term to the whole of existence? My terminological ingenuity is a heritage I should refuse.

Metaphor entices us. Indirection appeals. I can, and perhaps feel I must, speak of "a certain form of experience," as though the many forms of existence could remain, or would remain, within the same natural bounds and follow always and everywhere the same configurational movement and intent. We beg the question of natural bounds, overlooking that we have no license to think of any configurational movement as natural.

The deepest sorrow makes us impatient with subtleties and contingencies. We seem almost incapable of attending to what distinguishes one form of existence from another. What provokes this urge to tie these words, experience and existence? I almost had an answer to a question I had not intended to ask, by approaching that sorrow that defines, that event that appears common to all existence. I have to step away for a moment.

Years ago, I lived the roughshod life of a young man in voluntary exile in Mexico. I learned there to resist my inertia; I knew myself alive. I found myself clothed with an existence that sheltered me against that particular “form of existence,” though death, in its every manifestation, was all around me. I lived beyond death, or, as Berta Zapata would have it, *más intensamente*. At this distance, I seem to have lived closer to death. Certainly, anyone who had the nerve to associate with the stranger, meaning with me, displayed a high tolerance for risk, and for improvisation, for making do, for the delights of social ambiguity. One so endowed would find some pertinent fancy in death, and be willing to play in the gifted urbanity of graveyards. One learns to speak respectfully of that urbanity, if only to avoid an intimation of the primitive. Is it the case that my Mexico harbored the ancient insanities we attribute to the primitive mind? Can we account for this intensity we experience by referring to the evasions of such a febrile mind? Wouldn't it be better to see the Mexicans' playful encounter with death as the first step, or perhaps an iterative step, toward a historical conceptualization, the evidence of a process that leads to an altered consciousness? I could, for example, return to my beginning in this interlude, and treat certain terms as defining a domain as specific as any scientific or theological domain—words that would serve this structured domain with the intensity of an unimpeachable logic, while they simultaneously restructured other domains in which these words are found. Think of “inertia,” “the form of existence,” and the resonance in “clothed” and “sheltered.” In a sense, nothing I had done in Mexico, no report of my activity I could make, could be anything but a transposition of terms and an opening onto a new field. *El día de los muertos* is not my day of the dead, even if I speak the language.

I am rushing from commonality, and doing so seems an offense to common sense. Do we need an ostensive definition of death? Do we need a statistical account of its appearance throughout phenomenological existence? We point, but we have no real assurance of the phenomenon to which we point, and it is possible to believe that, however defined, that phenomenon is not ubiquitous, does not hold its shape even in those places where it does appear.

What does hold its shape in this regard? The question has paralyzed me for days. I should wonder how to go on, how to approach an inevitable confrontation without giving in to sentimentality or redundancy. These latter terms have to set bounds we thought we had transcended. We began a page threatening to do away with common measures, with sensible impulses that would tie us to that sentimentality and redundancy that can only obscure whatever makes a particular death of any interest or of any significance. And here we have come to an impasse over form—the form of a particular event; we must say the shaping of a particular event, or at least one that offers itself as a possible, if not the most productive, maneuver.

So, where have we come, if we now muck about with defensive maneuvers? If I concentrate upon brushing aside any impulses that resemble or that might in fact be impulses from the past, how does the intuition accomplish its work? It has to strike us that every gesture we might have made induces our intuition, an imaginative flowing toward a physical and psychic solution to a problem that insists upon its consequentiality. Perhaps I could close the problem by simply removing it from a necessary consideration to one that binds us to no solution. You might look upon this as a coward's way out. Such a move reminds me of my annoyance with that Berkeley colloquium that taught me the difference between subsistence and existence.

What frame can I now erect to begin the construction of an attitude toward death? But wouldn't that be the most egregious evasion? Think of the bad faith that turns the contemplation of death into a logical demonstration. I ask myself whether this inquiry wants its roots in logic. What kind of logic could at all be adequate to embody such a demonstration? I have proposed, most trivially, the idea that we often satisfy ourselves with an attitude toward death, a stance, a position, an appropriate behavior.

Isn't this a hell of a way to talk about death? As though some fidgety critic had determined that our primary task remains appropriate behavior, and has insisted that all that really matters lies in our abilities to subject the fact of death to rules by which we, and we alone, can determine its weight and consequence. This weight and this consequence will depend upon whatever contingencies in our social lives guide us at that moment. I have introduced the word—once again—contingency. Someone will rightfully say there is nothing at all contingent about death. You, yourself, someone will shout, have spoken of inevitability.

Cast the word aside, this contingency. If it must pass here, some will say, the word has to be more appropriately applied to life. What more contingent than life? The most astringent among us, if not to say the most adventurous among us, might give us that astringent tautology, life is contingency. What animates our quarrel with such an equation? Perhaps we begin in error, trying to extract a pattern of eventful behavior that would mark that behavior as life. We want to submit to an inescapable logic, one that will lead to the closure we call death. We have arrived at a difficult pass here. Questions overwhelm us. What would be the value of logic if we had to submit each individual death to the same investigation, as though the properties of

each were uniformly given. There I go, off on a tangent, racing dizzily away from the seeming logic of this argument. But how can it be apparent that an individual death has only those properties that are common to all deaths? You will quarrel with me now over the absurdity of speaking of the properties of an individual death, as though we needed a designation of properties to sustain our engagement with the fact of death. You will tax me with the difficulty of uncovering those attributes that an individual death displays. Can we speak of contingency as an attribute of life? Have we determined that contingency is not an attribute of death? Cast that word, contingency, aside.

But I haven't finished with the knot at the heart of this particular phenomenon. A surly Brobdingnag had raised its head for a moment. We wanted to acknowledge closure as a phenomenological event. That's a sentence, almost, again, an evasion. We pretend that all things come to an end. Experience teaches that. We can get into a new fix by investigating experience, or more exactly, investigating its many forms. There are those among us capable of plausibly arguing for and representing the experience of a Sonoran mud turtle (and I do not mean the poet with a presumptive imagination). So perhaps we can say that these same *cognoscenti* could plausibly give us the sense of defining closure from the turtle's point of view. Oh, don't be absurd, you say, forget this anthropomorphizing. That is precisely what I want to do, and precisely the reason I am finding it so difficult to be exact, to say anything incontestable about death.

We have rounded on ourselves. We skirted into a consideration of life, believing that, by doing so, we would open a path to the understanding of death. We have only moved from one insecurity to another. Why should this be so? Why can't we take death as a definitive end, the final mark upon existence?

The answer lies in the assertion that there are many forms of existence.

Does that take genius? Forgive me. The commonplace benignity of that paragraph's last sentence brings me close to my own closure, that is to say, brings me close to silence. And it is the silence to which one has to appeal, not as substrate but as substance. I have, I am sure, too often referred to a notion, gleaned from ill-remembered and poorly interpreted classical Chinese texts, that proposes silence as structure. The pilgrim at work on this text would very much like to yoke these disparate notions that have surfaced here, to see closure as a dominant element of structure and to see silence shading into the substantial domain that closure commands. Could we then turn to address that final mark upon existence? Could we have, by a roundabout route, given substance to existence, and have made it possible to measure the dimension of death? But, wait, we have a problem. We seem to have introduced the question we had been able to avoid. If it is permissible to speak of the many forms of existence, isn't it conceivable to speak of the many dimensions of death? You find nothing logical in this; you accuse the pilgrim of proposing death's dimensions as a tactical maneuver. I have no defense; I cannot appeal to logic; I can only apologetically appeal to intuition. We seem to be on the road to surfeit. Anyone set against an investigation of this sort will argue that terms multiply here without a trace of utility. Singular terms propagate along an ill-defined linear progression and turn up miraculously inscribed with a multiplicity of attributes, with uncharted dimensions and connections to supposedly unrelated terms. We are, it must be said, really at work upon relation.

You might sit in a dark room, in a meditative attitude, with the morning light gradually erasing the shadows. You might see

few, or none, of the objects in the room, but unless the room has nothing in it other than you and the chair, your body enters into definable relationships with everything in the room. I want to borrow a notion I have only recently encountered, and speak of the judgment embodied in aesthetic perception—that is, of the idea that such perception admits of degrees. Can we manage the outrageous notion that the body upon that chair enjoys variable relationships (I want to call it relationships of varying degree) with the many objects in the room, even with the room itself? I do not mean anything as simple as an individual preference for or a delight in any particular object or group of objects, though it is safe to imagine that, even in the dark, the impress (call it memory) of some particular object or grouping remains stronger than others. Something happens to us while we take notice of the room, its contents, its relationships, the configuration of particular rhythms. For it is the evolution of particular rhythms that we notice in taking notice. We give—I almost said, we make—the dynamics of the room's relationships; we establish the rhythms by which we know that we are there in the room. There, I have erred in implicating everyone in this room's structure. To be rigorous, I should speak only of the singular. We cannot get our minds around the abstraction of a collective body on a chair.

In just such fashion we cannot approach the idea of death's dimensions without awakening to its many degrees of relations. I risk saying that we can—not to say, we must—find analogy in the notion of death's dimensions and a many-valued degree of life's relationships.

I work to avoid slipping in an analogical bog. I cannot mean to say that any particular life will round to an inevitable and very particular death. Should we think of the oak outside the window, and watch its leaves fray and its bark go wormy, and

reason that the accident of arboreal life will someday seize its roots—make it subject to infestation, gaseous injury, or a rude cut that never heals? What is the point of its evolution into death? When can we say that evolution has begun? I cannot mean to say that I can see its dying any more than I can see its death. So I must deny that I can actually see its life, or, let me be grand as well as outrageous, and say that I can know very little about the intricate relations of its being. We find analogy at this point debilitating.

We find conceptualization onerous. Someone will argue, as folk have for centuries, that language gives us body, and that the more complex the language the more complex the body. Now, here we sit, trying to give depth and shape to death, to make it a concept that displays its complexity. But we are trapped by our inability to give substance to individuality and the complexity that individuality requires. We almost, in order to be able to say anything about the dimensions we claim to have uncovered when we speak of death, have to return to a logical operation. Intuition tells us to scurry from such an operation, without giving in to a debilitating and unrewarding form of mysticism. We have drawn close to what might be an insoluble problem.

We know we cannot submit this interrogation of death's dimensions to a logical operation; yet we know that we have an obligation to substantiate a phenomenon that can only be approached concretely, but one that resists the boundaries we presume to know. How can we frame the dilemma? We know what we sense, and yet we do not sense what we know. Or, we sense what we know, but do not know what we sense. We cannot settle the question by turning it into a problem in epistemology, or set the question aside by making it an ontological notion that requires neither solution nor comment.

I see now, too, how far we have come from an appeal to language. Irony of ironies, the familiar tolling starts. I catch myself before I go cascading into contradiction. Death's context is not in language. This investigation proceeds because we want to determine just where that context lies. We must say it again, and say it more simply: we intend, we can only intend, to establish death's domain and, in doing so, come upon an understanding of newly constructed relationships.

As we go, it might seem that this pilgrim revels in divestiture. Earlier on, it appeared that terms would proliferate beyond accountability or even utility. Now, it appears that this text suffers from the threat of being thoroughly without linguistic resources, deboned of any epistemological structure. Is that a necessary, or salutary, consequence of this type of inquiry? We ask ourselves whether it is necessary or desirable to be so definitionally astringent, placing our closure at the beginning of the beginning. But how is it possible to follow every line of inquiry suggested by a resident body that has never been fully apprehended or comprehensively questioned? We proceed, and confront, and negotiate with impossibilities.

Have we reached absurdity? Can the pilgrim really mean to suggest that death is an impossibility, or at best a negotiation that the mind, or the spirit, or something unperceived or misconceived, undertakes?

I perhaps have spent too much time around Peter Galison's books and essays, and have been too much influenced by his way with domain analysis, and I mean to say here, his idea of the inevitable, necessary, creative and salutary negotiation involved when practitioners in separate domains cross the borders. But why shouldn't we see negotiation as a functional impulse (I almost said, variable) in, or within, two domains that we usually and inexplicably keep separate? Passing, I notice that

I have said, happily, negotiation within the domains. I have to address that with-iness at some point, but must hold it apart from a primary discussion—that of the negotiation we can specify between life and death.

We approach an uninformative point here when we speak of life and death. The words, if not the events, are too often conjoined. We seem to rest content with our unimpeachable observation that one mode of existence ceases when the other begins. We feel wise because we do not go beyond observing their propulsive conjunction, and we feel courageous for having faced up to them as they are, or, I should say, as we think they are. We do not, understandably, want to create problems by asking what would seem absurd questions, bringing into play notions not normally associated with either mode and certainly not normally associated with the two modes in conjunction. We want simplicity. A body, a being, is alive, or it is dead. An entity is living or it's dying. The deep ones among us will insist that we are all, and always, dying from the moment of our birth. We must acknowledge the justice in such an assertion, while at the same time insisting that the assertion does not carry us very far. Speaking in the voices of the deep ones, we can say that, yes, life implies movement within, the constant negotiation of growth and decay. But here we are trying to go beyond a primary observation, a first understanding, and we need to subject our clear and simple ideas to further inquiry.

What can we possibly mean by negotiation with regard to life and death? What could each offer to the other?

We might begin by saying that life could offer death a future. Would I have been more exact if I had said the possibility of a future? Wouldn't that be another begging of the question, pretending that death could be held off and established only as a possibility? You might insist that the real question-begging

lies not in asserting the possibility of death but in ignoring the inevitability of death. We *must* have the recognition that we, all phenomena, die. That has to define the existence we here bring into question. But no, our approach suggests that life remains the primary possibility, and we can conceive of an absence that need not submit itself to our inquiry. Put simply, it is possible not to have come into existence. In such a case, there would be nothing to have a future; it would be absurd to speak of the culmination of a process that has no beginning; it would be absurd to speak of the potential of a form that by definition cannot be specified.

We feel that we have walked too far into abstraction. We seem to have walked away from singularity, from individuality, from the specific and proper case. Even if we shy from arguing universals, we must acknowledge that all we know (some would say, all that we can know) depends upon the individual and very specific case. We do not have to do a mathematical calculation, starting at one, to determine that we are surrounded by life. Life confronts us in its actuality, not in its possibility. If we think of the possibility of nonbeing, we have already entered upon a consideration of death. We cannot transform dead bodies into nonbeing nor think of nonbeing as the beginning of a process that leads to death. We cannot say with any assurance how we do proceed from the recognition of a living body to the recognition that some boundary between being and nonbeing has been overcome. That failure forces us to approach the notion of possibility with more trepidation, and makes us reexamine the idea of a future.

We have involved ourselves in a tangle of motives. We keep skirting the problem of time; we have no logical demonstration of time's efficacy in solving any of the problems that we can now associate with possibility or the future. We should be

uneasy in speaking of *the future*. We might say that we have introduced an insoluble complication by speaking of the multidimensionality of life and death. To be scrupulous, to bring this definable tense, the future, into our purview, we ought to allow the multidimensionality of the future, meaning that we cannot speak of the future but of futures. Nothing says that doing that will tell us anything of any use about the relationship of an individual life to its own individual death. I want to say that we assume that individuals have individual and differing futures, and I want to complicate that assumption by asserting that each individual proceeds through several and variable futures. Now, if we ask, can life offer death a future, we find ourselves confounded by a simplicity that cannot be realized.

Where is the flaw? Can it be in treating life as an attribute of individuals or, in error, turning individuals into an attribute of life? We proceed by an unpremeditated return, and yet we cannot speak of first principles; we cannot erase these difficulties by definition. Has our move to clear this domain faltered on the idea of negotiation? We keep turning around an implication of relation, as concept and as active force between life and death.

Donald Davidson, in a paper treating the irreducibility of the concept of the self, admits that, in order to talk about this problem, he has to address it indirectly. That pretty much is where I find myself with respect to the relation that compels my attention. We cannot find a direct line to the reality of such a relation. We recognize a need to take some things for granted, to accept some clearly defined notions as established, such as the one we have just introduced, reality. A skeptical bone tells us not to do that; analytical pride forces us to want an unimpeachable rigor. We want the words we use to be free of suspicion. But here we ask, who would, who has, cast suspicion on

notions that allow us to go forward, that sanction our investigation and help us to broaden the sphere, not only of our investigation but our experience? However we handle the question of irreducibility, we remain uneasy with the idea of proceeding obliquely toward even a tentative resolution of our problem.

You will say that we have got ourselves in a fix. We move forward with life's generosity; we suggest an exchange. We appear to have tried death's passivity, or to put it another way, to have attributed a passivity to death because life, in the instance we have just proposed, confers a future upon death. Color us not cantankerous when we suggest that we can begin from the other end and consider that death offers a future to life.

Looking at things this way controls our notion of time, and again we seem unprepared to address time's place in the relationship we have proposed. We want, in effect, to run away from the future, or to put it under erasure while addressing the perhaps insoluble relation of life and death. Surely, negotiation offers us a wide range of event, transactions between parties concerned to inhabit (we might say, share) the same ground. We have to take into account that negotiation also involves exclusion, a thinning that almost belies the apparent enhancement each party realizes. We meet with the idea that a negotiator in the process of negotiation is inevitably transformed, we might even say transfigured and risk the theological implication involved in doing so.

You will have noticed that we have slipped negotiation's reality past the gate of reality in itself. We played tricky with the future, but we insist upon continuing with the multifaceted process of negotiation. Why? It gives us a chance to talk about fertile notions, such as divestment and transformation, exclusion, inclusion, resistance and acceptance.

In the process of considering divestment, we can play stupid if we want, take the easy road. Imagine what seems a transparent conclusion that a person who dies has been divested of life, dispossessed of certain attributes we have to pretend to understand, that is, we think we have an understanding of what constitutes life. We must leave aside, for the moment, the complicated problem of a singular expression for life. We agree that every living entity will bundle its attributes toward that goal, that unique expression we can call life. In a sense, we divest life of those unmarked attributes that might define life. We might almost be said to be thinking negatively, constructing a non-existent realm that makes the forms of our attention upon life possible. We create a strange situation—divestment has become a requirement, a logic, of possibility (and perhaps we could take this notion to its extreme limits and say, the probability of life). We almost stumble into an absurdity: dispossession of non-existent attributes secures the possession of qualities that determine life. Our argument strives here to avoid coming to terms, again, at this point, with the idea that various forms of life might (we almost said, must) display differing attributes that make it possible, in each individual case, to declare that we have a life before us. This would complicate our consideration of dispossession. Put simply, all life, and I phrase it in this way to insist upon a necessary generality, might play among various formal attributes and varying forms of divestment. We might think of ourselves as playing among the probabilities of a life in possession of its proper attributes and the contending probabilities of that life being stripped of those attributes. We realize that we talk as though we would want to say divestment means taking any, in the sense of loss. Suppose, though, that we mean divestment as a freeing impulse, a liberating enhancement of existence, turning a body toward its entanglement with death? This

brings us to the paradox of welcoming the return of that bundle, that nonexistent realm we had thought to discard.

We thought divestment, and thought we could proceed by addressing a transparent conclusion, but find ourselves tempted, if not foolishly encouraged, to pursue notions that seem even more absurd than the ones we have proposed. I might have taken advantage of a move that allows me to pursue such absurdity, exchanging the terms divestment and dispossession, as though one were the translation of the other, as, in fact, we seem to understand. I have to focus upon dispossession as the operative term because that allows me to count upon the implication of possession. I need such linguistic trickery to address another fertile notion suggested by an act of dispossession; that notion is transformation.

Can we say that we can ever dispossess a body of an attribute by transforming that attribute, translating it into an altogether different entity? One might say that transformation has a value, while dispossession seems a thoroughly negative enterprise, and that such a translation would be senseless and useless. We think of transformation's positive value because we always think of transformation as a fully achieved act, a definitive move from one state to another, a substitution of one state for another where nothing remains of the prior state whose attributes can have no effect upon the new and realized state. But are we justified in thinking this way? Is there no residue of the prior state, something that not only determines the quality but that enhances our perception of and our abilities to use the current state? By asking these questions, we seem to be recalling that notion of entanglement we have noted.

What in the world can it mean to speak of death as a state we can use? We stopped along this way to address divestment, got ourselves thoroughly entangled in trying to account for

transformation, and have begun to treat the terms of our negotiation, or should I say, the terms of a negotiation we want apparently to find between life and death, as transparent, to such an extent that we have spoken of the quality of a state, states, we remain unable to define. We have compounded this confusion by speaking of enhancement of properties that we take to be involved in an irresolvable relation, and have arrived at the impossible notion of being able to use death.

There is, though, good reason to proceed along this path. We have tried to establish divestment as a liberating enhancement of existence. We have insisted upon divestment's, or dis-possession's, involvement with transformation, that is, transformation as a defining act that remains fluid. I insist that we can think of these two processes as qualities that allow us access to the deep, authentic qualities of life and death. We can speak of using death, as we can of using life, in the sense that they compel investigation into being itself. Use, by this measure, has been given exploratory value, and has thrown us into the danger of a wakefulness we might have refused.

One might ask, could we use something other than death? or life?—abstractions too impossible to contain. There could perhaps be other fundamental negotiations we could establish and explore. We could, and probably would, have far more success in displaying our ingenuity, but ingenuity is not the point; consciousness is, and remains so. So we speak to death, and negotiate its complex relationship to life to uncover another relationship that on its own might not reveal itself. You say relationship. You say consciousness. Where is the paradigm? To what does consciousness respond? And isn't this unremitting attention to that other negotiation simply a blind and blinding mistake? These questions make me acknowledge a momentary pause, and call attention to a perhaps debilitating blindness. My

consciousness might not, in this instance, respond to my blindness, or engage me in some paradigmatic ingenuity. One does not go tweaking death's nature and form to contain it. There is no paradigm to establish by searching death or its companionship with life, or by searching the elaborate and free-flowing body called consciousness. Pursuing death, you will embrace it. Coming into life's domain you will play with a body that runs away from you. I could distress you by asserting that consciousness might recoil from your touch. And yet we must be faithful to these dangers. Faithful to the vibrancy in the exclusion I have proposed.

We move from one outrageous proposal to another. We come to dispossession's rough edge, transformation's knotty interior. We try to keep our eye on that multifaceted process, called negotiation, but find ourselves called away from that meditation to attend to another engagement. If dispossession is indeed a form of freedom, we ought to be intoxicated with a concomitant freedom. I feel queasy about calling into being an attribute that seems trivial, meek, mocking. What makes me scramble after the idea of exclusion as a mark of such freedom I have proposed? Why not walk by the idea that to dispossess someone or something means to exclude some aspect of that particular being? Isn't it possible to approach, to see, this dispossessed being in what would appear a pristine state, that is, without even the intuition that some property has been set aside?

We can get silly about this. Let us say that we have a death before us. We recognize a dispossession. Some voice will raise itself against my attributing the idea of freedom to death, as I will have done by seeing death as dispossession. Someone will argue that it makes no sense to talk of a necessary exclusion when we have no evidence of a necessary existence of any property we might pretend to analyze. No one feels the need to

argue that it is inane to talk of the loss of a property that was never there. Thorough subtlety can charm us. Disingenuous subtlety can lead us astray. I must hear the clamor inevitably arising around the notion of that entanglement which makes exclusion a notable force, an instance, some might argue, of that disingenuous subtlety. Nevertheless, I insist that exclusion constitutes a part of that necessary freedom we encounter in dispossession. I will argue that we must understand exclusion as a process in which we are involved systematically in thinking about death (to restrict ourselves here to thinking about death). I mean to say here, too, that writing “systematically” should call our attention to our thinking as thinking of a system, meaning that these elements we are now proposing—such as dispossession, transformation, exclusion, inclusion—are components of a complex process whether we notice or understand this complex in its transparent or hidden forms (and I must speak of forms).

There, I have edged further into my argument for entanglement. Intuition tells us, and my proceeding through this questioning of the complex relationship, life and death, asks us to think in the plural. I would be unboundedly outrageous, and say that we can take what I have said about exclusion as an example of this systematic involvement. The body, let’s say, does not want to take on more attributes than it can use, and a living body, in the process of that negotiation we are trying to define, remains attuned to an ungraspable element, and the element under scrutiny here, exclusion, will affirm its weight by its absence.

We seem caught in a contradiction. Can absent, or non-existent, entities display weight? Can they have any effect upon a process that is, by its nature, observable, measurable? We circle these questions, and perhaps circle and evade the

task of defining what might ultimately be singularly simple. We ask ourselves whether we should pursue a composition or a decomposition.

Can I really be asking you to make a choice of procedure? Could I leave things like that, and pretend to advance a rigorous methodology, getting the terms straight, making necessary distinctions, preening ourselves upon having found the A and B of a logical argument? But would it make any sense to choose between addressing life, or death, as a composition, or addressing life, or death, as a decomposition? We think we could talk succinctly about life, if we only spoke of its composition, thereby giving it empirical definition. We could, on the other hand, speak of its decomposition, a gradual disintegration, an erosion of powers. I enter upon a dangerous area, and declare that this is not the choice I ask you to make. I mean to encourage us to accept a different cut, one having to do with exclusion. We work hard here to avoid a simple equation: cut equals exclusion. We move imaginatively to bring the idea of exclusion along a different path that leads us to see how it makes sense to think of being cut into life or, what I won't argue at the moment, being cut into death. I will insist upon our being given the opportunity to realize a possibility that did not exist prior to our consciousness of it, that indefinable moment when you awaken to that set of circumstances that tells you you are alive, or dead. I understand that you might feel that here I am being impossibly refined, buffing a trivial notion into significance.

But I cannot let the notion of choosing to be aware of a particular form of existence go unexamined. It might help to think of my version of the cut not as a cutting away but as a shaping, a way of giving form. We need only think of what we take to be a similar process in art. We have heard often enough, when someone speaks of an artist's accomplishment, she knows

what to leave out. So we have exclusion, but we need to remember that we think the thing in hand has been shaped by choice. Can we cross this border, perhaps too easily, and imagine that life in itself admits of what I will call first-order choosing, and mean by that that a consciousness admits—should I say, permits?—an awareness of a possible existence, shaped by what its form seems to exclude? Outrage enough? I will go further, and claim that what we can here understand through these propositions about life holds if we treat death.

We have given exclusion such a prominent place in our discussion that to speak now of inclusion might strike us as absurd. Need we fuss with the attributes of inclusion in order to fix our concepts of life and death? We pretend we have satisfied one set of claims by a persuasion to accept the realized claims of a set of circumstances we seem to have made the first term in a binary opposition. We might think exclusion as opposed to inclusion, the body present as opposed to the body absent. But our argument works to try to establish that we cannot use such a binary opposition and cannot see the body present and the body absent as anything if not entangled.

We keep skipping around certain notions, such as detachment, which the idea of exclusion and of inclusion brings to mind, and place. A body, living or dead, must have a place, some point upon which it rests, or from which it moves. But there we have the difficulty of thinking of place as a point or a set of points, and we ease further into difficulty by thinking that a body can be detached from its place. Before we pursue detachment, we face another question we probably would like to avoid. Should we think of a body in its place as a body resting in singular space? Or can we think of a body as inhabiting a many-valued space? And I might even suggest that we have been busy keeping bodies in motion, tying them to the activities that surround and

sustain them. That is a long-winded way of saying that an individual body needs the relation of other existent bodies—to be perhaps too plain about it, a body needs, for example, the resistance of air, the resistance of its own internal processes to the constitutive processes that lie outside the body. So all is movement; all is a process of a body detaching itself from place in order to inhabit the potential world of place or, to take this notion to its limits, to define and to redefine the inhabitable potential of place and, in doing so, to make of its internal processes a manifold construction, a constitution, of place.

We seem always to be effecting a return to some point we have left. At this point, you might be struck by what I will call a hidden variable. Our argument examines a form of existence, that is to say, it seeks an understanding of constitutive processes that speak to us of life and death. Where does the variable lie? What is hidden? If we reflect for a moment, we sense a presence we appear to have obscured—an audience.

What do we gain by introducing such an absurd complement to this discussion at this point? We think we have established the body present and, by implication, the body absent. We insist upon a certain cut into significance with regard to those bodies. We can even entertain the idea of place and its attendant property, detachment. We need not now pursue the plausibility of exclusion, inclusion, resistance and acceptance as engagements with form. Still, something itches. We could be naïve and ask, where do the questions go? Who is concerned with this puzzle we have summoned? Some misunderstanding, perhaps of intent, provokes us to say that the body present cannot be its own audience. That thought strikes us as error. The conscious body must indeed be its own audience. You contend that that might be true, if we mean Sarah or Saul, or the fawn that is just now crossing the lawn, or the hummingbird at the

butterfly bush. We must attribute a form of consciousness to all entities capable of movement. We pull rapidly away from an investigation of will, from any idea of a self-directed impulse that would lead us to make that oak we dispatched a reasoning ens and, god forbid, our equal. The question of audience becomes too tricky. It leads away from the many forms of existence we have struggled to establish. But there remains a virtue in thinking of audience as an entity's focused and singular attention to its presence and to its inevitable movement toward its death.

What are we proposing? that it takes an audience to confirm the body present and the body absent? that the constitutive potential of place only matters when there is a refutation, some force or being that can, in principle, deny these bodies' existence? We seem to suggest that a body's ability to deny its own existence is the mark of its existence. How far will that take us? Far enough to be brought face to face with the idea: so with life, so with death. If you can conceive of your nonexistence, can you not conceive of denying your own death? I want to phrase this in its most outrageous fashion: can't you conceive that death does not exist? What happens to our entanglement?

What we are asking is that death come into existence, submit itself to examination. Death might accommodate us, but, in doing so, it has to violate its individuality, for it can only enter into our examination as part of the configuration we have tried to establish. Why now ask it to stand apart so that we can search it for hidden attributes? We come to a point where we meet ourselves turning the corner of existence to find that we have encountered a fundamental problem—to account for the existence and inevitability of death. We cannot pretend that we can simply walk by this problem, take death for granted, treat it as though it were the only form of existence that fits on the other

side of that form we call life. If we proceed in this way, we are, in effect, playing in and with that logic we thought we had abandoned. Yet we find that we are forced to look for a third, perhaps indefinable form of existence that would have some effect upon the forms we have proposed.

Should we now give up and give in to an unexamined notion? Life seems no more than possible. We might even go further, and speak of life as a matter of probability, almost effacing ourselves in the unbridgeable world of probability. Someone sits, as I do now, and fiddles with a recalcitrant pen, distressed by the rough passage of thought to hand with the pen, annoyed with the ink that doesn't flow. What form of existence controls this negotiation? We must despair of ever untangling the phenomena that make such a simple act such a complex frustration, an unspecifiable bundle of cellular possibilities (say not, probabilities), which cannot be encompassed in a singular notion of existence we can only call life. A moment ago, we were proposing resistance as a criterion for life. But that was a concern of bodies, of the familiar bodies capable of conception, growth and decay. It would be absurd to say the pen falls into this category. Recall, though, that earlier we wanted to think differently about domain and how a body's extended domain helped to shape a form of existence. If, now, we turn back to death's individuality, we feel shamed by our inability to compose that face, undone by our failure to identify the manifold relationships of the many forms of existence. We have counted upon life's generosity, but we seem not to have been instructed in its cautions. This circumstance makes us return to entanglement. We do so because addressing entanglement seems the only way to say anything of any consequence about death.

Why should this be so? Why can't we subscribe to a third form of existence that would have nothing to do with death but

that would enter upon the same form of entanglement with life that we have given to life and death? Why should we not see a universe of entangled forms? That would, we think, do away with death's individuality. But there you catch us; you claim, correctly, that though we have been busy chasing death's individuality, we have not by any means established it. That failure calls up a more expensive one—the failure to establish life's individuality, meaning the failure to establish that only an individual life can lead to the kind of entanglement (if we can so phrase it) that makes sense of the complex negotiation we have under scrutiny.

In effect, we have buried death's individuality by calling up an entanglement of all phenomena. You will argue that we have become too clever by half, escaping a necessary evaluation of existence by simply observing a world, a universe, of phenomena, and accepting its presence as evidence enough of its existence. Inscribing that sentence required another look. I realized that the universe could not be the subject of our inquiry. We must be concerned with the phenomena that we believe compose that universe, and, if we count ourselves scrupulous, we would have to count upon and record the individual attributes of each one of those phenomena. You claim, as you might, that this is disingenuous, a further evasion. Here we are, trying to say something complete about death as a phenomenon that orders a form of existence, and arguing that we can find a disencumbrance that would justify such a generality, yet find ourselves brought up short because we cannot definitively assert the necessary being and particularity of the two phenomena we have chosen to explore in their relational existence. Have we come this far only to end accepting the relational value of everything? What do we need? A version of a theory of light? Something we could use to measure all

event, every collision, within that complex relationship we isolate for investigation?

We have run into a wall. We chase a formal construction that seems to tell us nothing about an actual construction, meaning that we cannot be sure that we are dealing with an actually existing phenomenon and have not allowed our imagination to create a set of possible events that we can set spinning in the universe simply by giving those events names. We track gently around the entanglement we have defined for these particular events, and hope that no undefined, or ill-defined, set of events appears to confound this particular entanglement. Here is the knot: we have conceived a misconception by admitting that we have not uncovered necessity.

Certainly, it sounds silly to say the man does not know if he is alive or dead. I argue that that is not the ultimate absurdity or the one that confronts us now. We might ask, does the man know that he is something other than alive or dead? Can we frame another form of existence? Can we begin the ordering of a lexicon in which we find a meaning for the phrase, “otherwise than being”? Mucking about in that lexicon might make it seem that we are arguing with a transcendental ontology or a Levinasian argument with essence. But I want to encourage a ruthlessness that goes beyond seeing ourselves as the point of existence and as the only negotiators, or should I say, the only subjects capable of a negotiation, or, going further, the only capable subjects of a negotiation we have defined. You will tread upon such ill-bred refinement. You will suggest that I cannot even conceive what would bring about the negotiation, the formulative events, that involve the growth and emptying of that oak we might soon dispatch. Our relationship to the oak is not here at play. We will get nowhere with analogy. We seek an understanding of an ontological form that might not have surfaced. Being

unacquainted, or at least ill-at-ease with the form, we cannot ascertain its applicability, or its place, in a universe of forms. We continue to go from outrage to outrage. If you follow me along this path, you will see that I have involved us in a universe of potential and perhaps indefinable forms.

This is a hell of a way to proceed. We start trying to understand death and existence; we break off to ask about other forms of existence; and end by asking if existence can be called by another name, by other names. The term, *existence*, seems to travel on common sense. We say, I exist, you exist, Buenos Aires exists, the Sonora Desert exists, the peacock exists. We find it easy to extend the range of existence. Our imagination might insist that angels exist, or God exists, or that there is an existent spirit, growing out of the emptiness within us. We never pause to examine these declarations; we would be embarrassed by the evidence before us. I am not opening that box of tattered arguments for the appearance and substance of phenomena. We will not, at this point, set off to prove God's existence, or work energetically to establish our own. Someone might contend that we have bound ourselves irrevocably by proposing a fundamental act that we have called negotiation long before we had unequivocally established the properties we would accept as evidence of life's or death's existence. We ran with an ordinary acceptance of such properties. We let ourselves be carried away by a fundamental need to have a subject and a desire to account for a complexity of motives guided by what we thought unimpeachable perceptions.

Our investigation wants to retreat. We keep winding ourselves into difficulties because we cannot accept any complex of attributes that would tell us that we had exhaustively defined our subjects. Perhaps our greatest difficulty might reside in our inability to insist upon the truth of our perceptions. I hear your

laughter. Would we have these difficulties if we hadn't proposed death as our most capable cohort? Or if we had not declared our intention to examine death as though it were as complex as what we understand as life? We need not speak of mystery. But uncovering a disequilibrium in our perception of death we have uncovered a disequilibrium in our perception of life, and have made that particular entanglement worthy of our regard because it leads away from itself, not by analogy but by methodological implication to domains that lie apart from that entanglement.

What have we done to ourselves? Were we, in fact, after an assured explication of those discernible events, life and death? We certainly do not have that. We seem only to have occasioned a proliferation of questions about the relations of any and all events, to bring into question the notion of an intrinsic conscious life. We struggle with the proper way to state this proposition because we have had to refer not only to consciousness but to life, the very point under scrutiny—that is to say, we treat the subjectivity we claimed as a fundamental need. Oh, you caught me. Shouldn't we, in order to be scrupulous, speak of an intrinsic conscious death? Don't accuse me of playing games in opposition to a voice that has only briefly appeared here. I work hard to keep these pages free of an exegesis, or a questioning, of the specific subjective consciousness we find in Levinas. I want to go beyond the notion that an unperceived material thing can only be its capability of being perceived.

I want to enter that universe of potential and perhaps indefinable forms to ask whether the material existence of such forms is not an inherent attribute that remains impervious of our perception. Perhaps we ride toward disaster. But let us suppose the existence of forms that do not rely upon any definition of existence we have so far proposed; in other words, we might suppose that they respond to (or, if you want, we might grasp them by)

(continued...)