

Excerpt from:

Sovereignty, Territoriality and Beyond, for Example

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July 2000

For the First International Workshop on Ontologies of the Political
University of Victoria, British Columbia, August 2000

A Note on the Excerpt to Follow

What follows is an extended excerpt from chapter 2 of my *Sovereignty, Territoriality and Beyond, for Example*. The manuscript concerns itself with questions of sovereignty and modern territoriality. It does not proceed, however, by way of a direct appraisal of these concepts. (As the founding performance of statecraft, the effective [but never finalizable] *state-ing* or enunciation of these concepts is, after all, the possibility condition of any order in which concepts of any sort may be presumed at once coherent, authoritative, and capable of rule.) Instead, it proceeds by way of a protracted reading of John Gerard Ruggie's self-consciously synthetic piece, *Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations*, a piece that would historicize the modern states system, repeatedly posing the problem of language in relation to an imagined postmodern transformation in articulations of international political space.

In offering these twenty-five pages in the context of the present workshop, it is not my intention to relate themes or arguments of the larger manuscript, and still less to dwell on Ruggie's text. The excerpt in fact exploits a bit of epigraphic luck and concentrates rather narrowly on T.S. Eliot's *Little Gidding*, the fourth of Eliot's *Four Quartets*, the verse from which Ruggie takes the headnote of his text. My justification for offering these pages, if justification there be, is that Eliot's verse is pertinent to this workshop insofar as it undertakes a kind of performance that is precisely concerned with the problem and politicality of ontology: for Eliot, the problem of origins, of tradition, of significant soil, of integral being, of England, of Europe, of civilization, of effecting a still point of the turning world where the power of the Word may be presumed absolute and the being of the social subject can be secure. This still point is this would-be intersection of timelessness and time, the particular and the universal is, for Eliot, the home where we start from, the source whence signifying powers and discriminating authority may provisionally be said to derive, the origin wherefrom language's impossible conquest of time must always begin, always again. Yet this still point that would supply the extrahistorical ground of all beginnings remains also an unconsummable end.

Responding to a problem so constructed, Eliot's verse works, to the extent that it works, to exemplify, cultivate, and set in motion a subjectivizing (though never integrally subjectivized) posture that would be disposed to undertake the choreography of a necessarily allusive, always elliptical, ever failing, and therefore always necessarily renewed dance of words a performance that would be capable of effecting an intersection of time and timelessness insofar as it can resist the temptations of life in time, deafening itself to the shrieking voices, scolding . . . mocking that will always assail it in the desert of history between two worlds become like each other. His foremost problem, albeit one never expressly pronounced, is how to motivate this posture: how to give people to know that as they are still in motion, always in motion in ways traversing every imaginable boundary, they must necessarily be in search of that kind of motion that stills; how to give people to seek communion and community with one another, recognize one another, differentiate and territorialize one another, not in terms of any describable traits, definite historical affiliations, or enclosed rose gardens of tradition, but with regard to the way in which they submit their movement to the ghostly ontotheological ideal of timeless, integral being at home and at one with the power of the Word. (One might note that Eliot, this student of F. H.

Bradley, is in this respect seeking somehow to effect the **A**determination of indetermination in self-determination[@] without which it would be impossible even to imagine history's conforming to any dialectical logic).

Is this verse pertinent to a workshop that would take up a literature one of whose favorite quotations says something about political theory's needing to **A**cut off the head of the king,[@] a workshop in which, also, the name Thomas Hobbes will no doubt be repeatedly uttered? Can there be some value in juxtaposing Eliot's performative posture, his posture at once poetic and critical, alongside a literature on governmentality, a literature itself interested in the dissemination of strategic postural dispositions? In answer, I would simply recall that according to a chronology Eliot himself presents elsewhere, the problem to which his verse responds **B** the problem of language, the problem of the authority of the presumptively timeless and universal Word -- has been the problem of politics since the Puritan Revolution. The performative posture his poetry would exemplify and work to (re)activate in reply has been indispensable to the **A**vitality[@] **B** the continuity, the power, the effectivity **B** of a modern political **A**tradition[@] since the beheading of Charles I. While it is possible to maintain, as many have, that *Little Gidding* is Eliot's most **A**postmodern[@] verse, it is also possible to suggest that in these respects at least, Eliot's verse is oriented to the conducting of a kind of statecraft not lacking in similarities to the statist poetics of Hobbes.

To read Eliot's verse is to open to the possibility that if modern political *theory* has been enclosed according to the assumption of thought's *necessary* submission to the task of affirming the power of one or another rendition of a sovereign center where language's power would be absolute (and I think this in itself is a proposition in need of serious qualification), modern *statecraft* (of which, I would say, Eliot's poetry is a self-consciously exemplary instance) has not been so enclosed. It is perhaps the performativity necessary to the effecting of such an enclosure. To read Eliot's verse is to open to the possibility that for modern statecraft, the necessity of deference to a posited sovereign center is never presupposed, always an event that might not happen, indeed, an event whose failure to happen must be endlessly (re)affirmed in the motivation of the performances that would work to produce it in a history that language can never finally differentiate and bound.

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*, quoted as
epigraph to John Gerard Ruggie's
'Territoriality and Beyond'¹

[Perhaps, then, in beginning a reading of John Ruggie's 'Territoriality and Beyond,' I might respond to a summons posed at the very outset of that text.]. I might approach and try to understand the space at once opened and occupied by the just-recited quotation from Eliot's *Little Gidding*: the epigraph appearing just *below* the proper name 'John Gerard Ruggie' that would denote the singularity, fixity, and continuity of an enduring program claiming this text as its own and just *above* 'The year 1989,' the words with which the first paragraph of 'Territoriality and Beyond' opens to the problem of time and language, ends and beginnings.

Now surely, one cannot claim to master the meaning of even these few lines from Eliot's 'farewell to poetry,' the fourth of his *Four Quartets*, the several providing Eliot's self-conscious summary of a poet's life, each alluding to and well beyond the preceding *Quartets*, and each and all preoccupied with beginnings and ends, with 'time past and time future,' and with the sheer 'difficulty of taking place or past for granted.'² Just as surely, one cannot pretend to master the meaning of the quoted stanza *for Ruggie*, whose program has long been equally preoccupied with beginnings and ends and with the problem of language, time, and temporality; each of whose writings self-consciously echoes writings before; and whose 'Territoriality and Beyond' would specifically look to the past in addressing

the question of place in the future. How audacious it would be to claim to grasp even the function of this stanza: the connections it would establish between the enduring intentions of Ruggie and his program, on the one hand, and the text called 'Territoriality and Beyond,' on the other.

Does Ruggie, who might be thought to imagine himself somewhere at the uncertain temporal frontiers of the modern and the postmodern, look to *The Four Quartets* because this poem is arguably in some ways the most 'postmodern' verse of Eliot's poetic oeuvre,³ itself so often cited (along with, say, Joyce and Pound) as both culminating and charting the highpoints of a 'modern literary history'? Is Ruggie, whose 'Territoriality and Beyond' would remember history in thinking the future, drawn to *The Four Quartets* out of respect for the dialectic of 'memory and imagination' that would be played out and poetically surpassed (a desire neither attained nor attainable, the poem affirms, but impossible to relinquish, too) in the movement from the first quartet to the last? Does the affinity perhaps reside in a sense of a task that might be attributed to both Ruggie's program and Eliot's 'programme for the *metier* of poetry': to somehow be 'still and still moving,' to be ever in motion at the 'still point of the turning world' where alone it is possible to sustain the conceit that one's language might 'conquer time' even though one can never be other than in history, in time? Is it *Little Gidding's* fascination with an imagined historical resolution of such paradoxes in the proper-named national state born of European Christendom, for Eliot, in *The Four Quartets* as elsewhere, idealized as 'England,' an ideal of an English national community fired by war, an ideal of a 'significant soil,' of *terra*, of *la terre*, emerging in the midst of air-borne *terror*, that Ruggie means to evoke in opening his 'Territoriality and Beyond'? Or, as just one more possibility, has Ruggie selected these lines from Eliot's poetry as a way of signaling the literary sensibility that his text will cultivate: a sensibility so much like Eliot's in its resistance to romantic imagination and respect for knowledge born of reasoned discriminations; its distrust of predetermined 'subjective' emotions that author or reader might bring to a text; its aspiration to project

a well-modulated, depersonalized voice that speaks a "hard, dry lyric" and generates "objective" understandings through the direct and detailed presentation of sensory information?

Possible interpretations all. A scant few, in fact, among an indefinitely multiplying variety of possible interpretations -- all equally arbitrary, none necessarily any more valid than the next. No chain of words crisscrossing texts signed Eliot or Ruggie or the names to which they refer could determine which among these and other imaginable connections the reader must regard as binding. An epigraph to a text is always offered *in ellipsis*, after all. An epigraph might be a quotation, but it does not occur within the formally marked bounds of the text to illustrate a particular point or to lend authority to a particular conclusion. It is not offered, for instance, in the way that Ruggie, late in the text, offers Charles Tilly's words:

. . . [F]undamental transformation may have had long-historical sources, but when it came, it came quickly by historical standards. . . Once the system of modern states was consolidated, . . . the process of fundamental transformation ceased: "[states] have all remained recognizably of the same species up to our own time," Tilly concludes, though their substantive forms and individual trajectories of course have differed substantially over time.

Unlike the words borrowed from Tilly, the quotation from *Little Gidding* occupies the space of an epigraph, a space that is always the space of an ellipsis spanning the unmeasurable distance between authorial signature and text. As such, it both marks and occupies the space of an unspoken and perhaps unspeakable connection, a space where words perhaps fail to be uttered or, if uttered, fail to control the meanings of things.

But an epigraph to a text, like an ellipsis in a sentence or a line of poetry, is not a void. It is a space of incorrigible ambiguity and proliferating interpretive possibilities that one is *invited* to read -- that one *must* try to read, try to understand, try to fill with meaning if one is to make sense of the arc of language in which it appears. So it is with the stanza stripped from *Little Gidding*. One is invited to read this epigraph, summoned to read it. One cannot not try to read this elliptical epigraph if one is to develop some sense of the meaning of 'Territoriality and Beyond' for Ruggie, for his program, for all who would participate in the culture of which the author, the program, the text would be imagined a part. One cannot not try *even though it is impossible finally to determine its meaning*.

It is impossible, first, because the meaning of this elliptical epigraph, like the meaning of any ellipsis, can be determined only by reference to the context of the before and after in which it appears: again, author Ruggie and his program, on the one hand, and the text entitled 'Territoriality and Beyond,' on the other. It is impossible, second, because this context is not itself determined for one but depends, among other things, on the meaning supplied to the elliptical connection itself -- a meaning that is itself indeterminate. How can one determine the purport of this elliptical epigraph -- the intended connection it would convey between 'Territoriality and Beyond' and the author and his program -- without first determining the meaning of that text *and* the intentions of Ruggie and his program? Likewise, how can one determine the meaning of 'Territoriality and Beyond' for Ruggie and his program without first determining the meaning of this epigraph that marks the passage between the two? How can one do either given that *every* writing in Ruggie's program -- not to mention Eliot's poetry -- would seem to have no necessary contextual boundaries, would raise the very problem of boundaries, would indeed borrow its powers from all the resources of a culture even as it would participate in the construction,

limiting, authorization, as well as the problematization of the very cultural tradition upon which it might be imagined to rely?

True, one might try to resolve these difficulties by adapting one's expectations to a much simplified construction of the relationship between epigraphic quotation and text. The function of an epigraph, one might say, is not so much to elucidate in any determinate way the author's intentions or the meanings of the text it precedes but to dignify that text, to lend a certain weight to it, to ground it in an established tradition and thereby accord to it a certain cultural authority. Applying the point to the epigraph from *Little Gidding*, one might say that it functions to grace "Territoriality and Beyond" with an authority grounded in and derived from the remembered tradition that is quoted, with quotation providing the medium of grounding and derivation.

On this account, Ruggie, in selecting and offering this epigraph, is not so much anticipating the arguments of "Territoriality and Beyond" or explicating the connections between those arguments and his own program. He is instead situating himself, his program, and his text in a particular cultural tradition, presumably shared by a readership and signified by *The Four Quartets*, thus in a way to locate, ground, and authorize his work. And of course, were Ruggie's intent consistent with this interpretation, he would not be alone. When, in 1921, Eliot passed an early manuscript of *The Waste Land* to Ezra Pound, the manuscript included an epigraph from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, an epigraph that pleased Eliot because it was, he said, the most "appropriate" to *The Waste Land* and the most "elucidative" of its themes he could find. Pound objected, however, that Conrad was not nearly "weighty" enough for the purpose of an epigraph, presumably because a readership could not be counted on to accord to this near-contemporary the historical-traditional authority required. Relenting,

Eliot replaced the quotation from Conrad with the present epigraph from Petronius= *Satyricon*, written in Latin and Greek. The result: an epigraph that does relatively little to elucidate *The Waste Land*'s themes but much to intimidate the reader, lending a presumptive 'weight' to a text that now situates itself deep in the imagined Greek and Roman (and for most readers linguistically inaccessible) origins of a European tradition.

Still, it would be difficult to come to rest with this interpretation of the epigraph borrowed from *Little Gidding*. It would be especially difficult for anyone who, like Ruggie, has read *Little Gidding*, *The Four Quartets*, some sample of Eliot's earlier verse, and at least a few of Eliot's own critical essays. For if it is the case that, according to its subtitle, 'Territoriality and Beyond' is interested in 'Problematizing Modernity in International Relations,' it is unmistakably the case that all these writings by this Twentieth Century icon of a modern tradition of English (or *European*⁴) *literature do much to problematize the idea of a representable modern tradition, that is, a modern tradition that could provide a deep, timeless, and original source of authority, already there to grace and lend significance to the contemporaries who would borrow from it.*

*Of Eliot it can certainly be said that he valued the ideal of tradition, making the 'vitality of tradition' his first criterion of authentic poetry. But it must also be said that in his critical writings, in his poetry, and perhaps most thematically in *Little Gidding* among his poems, Eliot not only held fast to this ideal but also sought to sustain a consciousness of the unsurpassable historicity of tradition as a certain ground and source of authority available to the poet, his readership, his culture today. That is why, in *Little Gidding*, one encounters the words anticipating Ruggie's epigraph: 'What we call the beginning is often the end and to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from.'*

If, for Eliot, our explorations must seek to *begin* from a remembered tradition in which might be grounded some authentic language capable of generating an experience of an absolute unity of understandings and emotions impervious to the torments of time, the very fact that we must *seek* to so begin defines this beginning as equally our unrealized *end* now, here, in time. Now, here, in time -- since the Puritan Revolution and the beheading of Charles I, according to Eliot's own chronology -- we have been cut off from any innocent experience of tradition as a pure, timeless, and simply given unity of language and feeling. Now, here, in time, this experience of >our beginnings= always remains to be made. Now, here, in time, the making of this experience can only be our end for a future that has not yet arrived. If anything unites us today, if we have anything like a common beginning today, if there is some justification for sliding so easily between the individual poet and the >we= today, it is, in the words of *Little Gidding*'s last passage, >a condition of complete simplicity (costing not less than everything).= It is nothing more than the sharing of this abstract end in the knowledge that, to recall Eliot's pun, >now, here= is also >nowhere.=

>We shall not cease from exploration= because, while our beginning is our end, we now and here have nowhere we can simply be. >We shall not cease from exploration= because now, in time, we who would be at one with tradition can never stop moving; can never stop trying to fashion some sense of our completeness in a >dance of words= from which we would begin; and yet, can never fail to sense the ways in which the semblances of complete, integral, ordinary being we would choreograph are assailed by >shrieking voices scolding, mocking, or merely chattering.= Our words will >strain, crack and sometimes break, under the burden, under the tension, slip, slide, perish, decay with imprecision, will not stay in place, will not stay still.= This will always be the case *today*. And that is why, living in time,

we must always begin the dance of words again, making the sustaining of our commitment to this beginning-again our one fixed end, the place where we start from:

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from. And every phrase
And sentence that is right (where every word is at home,
Taking its place to support the others,
The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
An easy commerce of the old and the new,
The common word exact without vulgarity,
The formal word precise but not pedantic,
The complete consort dancing together)
Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
Every poem an epitaph. And any action
Is a step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's throat
Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start.

Little Gidding would thus be the least likely of poems to be quoted for the purpose of gracing a text with an authority grounded in tradition. Even if one were disposed to interpret the epigraph as performing this function, the very fact that the quotation *is* from *Little Gidding* could only serve to unsettle this interpretation. Far from celebrating the self-evident presence and powers of an established, well-bounded tradition in which a contemporary text might find its authorizing foundations, *Little Gidding* draws its readers into a paradoxical experience of trying to live, read, write, and make sense of things in the uncertain time and space of an ellipsis where no "significant soil" offers secure footing,

where no language can finally control the proliferation of possibilities, and where the boundaries of every text and every context are not, not yet, defined.

That, after all, is the effect of reading the *Four Quartets*, of ›dancing‹ with Eliot's ›dance of words.‹ That is the effect of troubling over the poem's unanalyzed juxtapositions, gaps of logic, ›hints and guesses‹ at analogies, elisions of subject and object, slidings between scene and act, allusions to allusions to still more distant allusions, ›raid[s] on the inarticulate,‹ and ›way[s] of putting it, not very satisfactory‹ all crying out for the reader's independent labors of memory and imagination to bring them to stable completion. Elliptical in their very language and structure, *Little Gidding* and the preceding three *Quartets* summon readers into an experience of ellipsis that is also the experience of the historicity of all they might name, know, and value in the present. The *Four Quartets* summon readers into a time preceded by a remembered timeless tradition from which modernity is severed, a time lacking determinate grounds for the determination of meaning and now experienced in the dissociation of each from everyone and everything, and yet a time experienced in the light of an ever deferred future end of history when, as in the imagined beginning, the poet's emotive lyric and the truth of the Word can be one.

What sense is to be *made* of the awaited future? Now, here, nowhere, it depends upon the way in which the traditional past is constructed in the memorializing dance of words of today. What sense is to be *made* of the past? Now, here, nowhere, the memorialized tradition that authorizes interpretation and conduct is ever to be fashioned anew in the service of the abstract future end now imagined. Past and future; beginnings and ends; all are to be embraced in the inclusive simultaneity of an elliptical now and here that can have no definite bounds, no definite time, and no definite geography

because, lacking any timeless tradition, it lacks the language that could authoritatively define and fix them once and for all.

In sum, from the very beginning of ›Territoriality and Beyond,= even before it begins, from a point when one is not sure that it is beginning or is stating its end, and by way of a few lines borrowed from a poem that itself troubles over the problem of cultural borrowings, beginnings, and ends -- from just this point, so difficult to place, so motile, so resistant to description, so crucial to signification and yet so bereft of powers finally to determine the meanings of things, Ruggie's text summons its readers. One, as reader, has already heard the invitation, advanced into this uncertain space of ellipsis, and begun this impossible labor of reading. One is already detached from every affiliation, dislocated, and on the move. One is already stirring amidst all the possible interpretations of texts marked Ruggie, marked Eliot, marked by all the exemplary names to which these texts would refer and allude. One is already engaged in the impossible activity of reading in ellipsis even before the text begins. Already, even before ›The year 1989.=

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›The year 1989" -- not even with these first words of the text's first paragraph does one depart this ellipsis. By way of these words, by way of the first paragraph, indeed, by way of the first five and a half pages of ›Territoriality and Beyond,= one is reminded that the whole of the ›world polity= is living now the uncertain experience of an historical ellipsis. This ›convenient historical marker= with which ›Territoriality and Beyond= begins is said to mark an end: the end of the Cold War, the end of strategic bipolarity, the end of the postwar era. It marks the end of a time, a time that can be remembered in

terms of its own ›distinguishing attributes;= a time whose distinguishing attributes can be retrospectively understood to have ›structure[d] expectations and imbue[d] daily events with meaning for the members of [a] social collectivity;= a time for which ›there exist[ed] a shared vocabulary describing Athe world;@ a remembered time in which change itself might have been confidently regarded as ›incremental,= that is, as reliably structured according to these attributes and reliably interpretable according to this shared vocabulary. ›The year 1989" marks the end of a time so remembered. It so marks it, at any rate, for the imagined readers most likely to take up this text, the imagined readers of *International Organization* who would remember themselves as having been ›members of a social collectivity= memorialized just so. But if ›the year 1989" can be thought to mark an end, the text explains, it equally marks a possible beginning. If the world thought once to have been so readily describable in terms of the vocabulary of strategic bipolarity now seems ›fluid,= it equally seems ›about to be remade.=

Ends and new beginnings, past and future, death and rebirth, the ›memory and imagination= of Eliot's *Four Quartets* -- in the conjuncture marked by ›The year 1989,= there is no certainly describable present. There is only this sense -- this haunting sense -- that one is somehow displaced and perhaps in passage ›between= two times and two worlds, neither affording certainly describable reference points, neither providing a context that can be invoked with any certainty to establish direction and stabilize the meaning of the elliptical present. Marking a conjunctural passage, ›the year 1989" equally marks the ellipsis from which the text embarks.

One would be attributing an unwelcome superficiality to ›Territoriality and Beyond,= however, were one to infer that this post-Cold War conjunctural moment so conveniently marked by ›the year 1989' were the principal object of the text's analytic attentions. For this text, like the most important

works of Ruggie's program, is above all interested in taking a long-historical perspective and getting to the depths of things. In taking up the question of change and postmodern transformation, >Territoriality and Beyond= is certainly not concerned with *incremental* change within a stable institutional context. But neither is it really concerned with the sort of *conjunctural* change that >the year 1989" would conventionally be taken to mark and upon which so much of today's international relations literature would seem endlessly to fabulate. The text is simply not interested in the new >attributes= and >vocabulary= that might be understood to substitute for the institutional matrix of a now bygone >world of strategic bipolarity= in structuring expectations and framing the meanings of actions *among states*. A conjunctural change such as this might be explained in terms of a >shift . . . in the play of power politics= among states, but the text is interested in more >fundamental= change. It is interested in change in the very >stage on which that play is performed= -- change that is comprehensible, if comprehension can even be imagined, at the level of the modern system of states itself. The >world= of the modern system of states, the text explains, >exists on a deeper and more extended temporal plane.= But it, also, >may be fluid and in the process of being remade.= This is the >deeper level,= the >more extended temporal plane,= where one may think beyond incremental change and beyond conjunctural change to the question of *epochal* change. At this level and on this plane, too, it is possible to think the death of the familiar and the birth of the new. Here, too, the world may be living the haunting experience of ellipsis.

From surface, then, to depth; from the relative immediacy of the last half of the Twentieth Century to a >temporal plane= spanning the whole of modern history > this is the movement with which >Territoriality and Beyond= invites attention to the question of epochal change from modern to postmodern forms of articulating global political space. To repeat, >the year 1989,= like the epigraph

from *Little Gidding*, marks an ellipsis. It marks an experience of living in ellipsis immediate and intimately familiar to an imagined reader, even if, for this imagined reader, it familiarly connotes an experience of emergent uncertainty regarding a more or less immediate temporal horizon, an experience of estrangement from Cold War institutional structures remembered to be hitherto so familiar. In *»Territoriality and Beyond,* though, the point is not to call attention to this *»conjunctura* experience for its own sake. The point is to recite this ever-so familiar contemporary experience of living in ellipsis because it can function as a useful example, an example that might be generalized (vertically, one might say, to a *»deeper* level, and laterally, also, on a *»more extended temporal plane*) to enable a thinking of the question of *»epochal* change. By citing this widely cited example of estrangement from hitherto familiar *»attributes* and the language describing them, and by inviting readers to generalize from this example beyond the usual linguistic limits of their post-Cold War commentary and on a *»temporal plane* reaching well beyond the last decades of the Twentieth Century, *»Territoriality and Beyond* would invite its readers to regard even the *»stage* of the modern system of exclusionary territorial states as strange.

»Territoriality and Beyond would invite its readers to regard this *»stage* -- their very footing -- as a socially constructed effect of depth and solidity that might be understood to happen in history but whose continuity can by no means be taken for granted. As the first five and a half pages of the text are at pains to show, even at this *»depth level* all manner of visibly consequential happenings elude attempts to decide their meaning. *»Distinguishing attributes* of a system of states are put in doubt and no longer function effectively to *»structure expectations.* And to describe these changes, words fail. *»No shared vocabulary exists.* *»Last year's words belong to last year's language, and next year's words await another voice.*

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The last sentence is not to be found in ›Territoriality and Beyond.‹ The words belong to the ›familiar compound ghost‹ encountered by *Little Gidding*’s poet-narrator in his pre-dawn stroll through some of the poem’s most dark-lit lines. The words are apt nevertheless. Summoning its readers into an historical ellipsis, the opening pages of ›Territoriality and Beyond‹ conjure an experience as ›intimate and unidentifiable‹ as the poet’s upon meeting his spectral double, the ghost. They conjure an experience to be felt with a directness and an immediacy; an experience in which everything one might name, know, or value in the world, even one’s very identity, is at stake; and yet, at the same time, an experience that puts all this at risk because the political cartography of one’s life is rendered strange, the very grounds of one’s every interpretation are shaken, and one’s language seems inadequate to the task of even describing, let alone explaining, the ellipsis of change one is in. But these opening pages also do something more. In conjuring this experience, they set up a situation in which the reader would be disposed to interrogate ›Territoriality and Beyond‹ much in the way that the poet-narrator interrogates his ghostly double: seeking the disclosure of a permanent posture appropriate to this experience of living in ellipsis and ready to receive this disclosure as a ›gift reserved for age.‹

It is not difficult to understand why a reader would be inclined to so interrogate ›Territoriality and Beyond.‹ Cast by the early pages of the text into an historical ellipsis, not told directly what to make of it, given to know that the whole of world politics is at stake, and told repeatedly that we lack a shared vocabulary with which even to speak about it, the reader would be forgiven were she to cast about for something fixed, something permanent, something with which she might identify and by which

she might take her bearings in this uncertain situation, if only to be able to read the text. And since the text exempts nothing from this experience of change -- since *everything*, to the very depths of every *thing*, is rendered fluid and in motion -- the reader, in the end, is left to look to the text itself: what it does and how it does it as much as what it expressly *says*. The reader is left to interrogate the text in the hope that it will disclose some stable posture; some fixed attitude that the reader might emulate and make her own; some permanent disposition that will make it possible for her and every equally estranged reader to face up to the risks, make the appropriate sacrifices, and endure, as the text and every other equally estranged reader of that text must endure, all the uncertainties of life in this historical ellipsis.

Noting this, it is perhaps appropriate to look closely at the passage of *Little Gidding* where the poet-narrator encounters his ›dead master,‹ whom the poet had ›known, forgotten, half recalled, both one and many.‹ For in this climactic passage of the poem, the poet seeks to learn from this ghostly ›dead master‹ the lessons ›reserved for age,‹ and the ghost, in reply, performatively convenes a kind of seance in which a posture appropriate to the torments of life in time is indefinitely reenacted.

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In *Little Gidding*, one might recall, this ›intimate and unidentifiable‹ experience both prompts and is prompted by the poet's assumption of a ›double part‹ -- each knowing himself ›yet being someone other,‹ each facing himself as stranger with ›face still forming,‹ each crying and hearing his cry as the cry of another (‹What! are *you* here?‹), each ›compelled‹ by the cries so voiced to recognize

himself in the other. This eerie experience of estrangement and doubling, in which the poet-subject moves so easily from an "I" who is here and now to a "we" who could be anywhere at anytime, is wholly abstract, even unearthly. It entails the complete dispossession of the parties. They can own nothing, stake no earthly claim. It allows for no definite historical affiliations, no identification with any already differentiated time, place, or body. Weightless, the doubled figures of this experience move with the wind:

And so, compliant to the common wind,
Too strange to each other for misunderstanding,
In concord at this intersection time
Of meeting nowhere, no before and after,
We trod the pavement in dead patrol.

The pavement could be that of any city: Eliot's London, Baudelaire's Paris, Augustine's Carthage, any city that might be imaginatively gathered to modernity's present recollections of itself. Its urbanity is known only in the noiseless, colorless, depersonalized abstraction of a dead patrol: an unceasing temporal movement that can have no fixed ambit because its only fixity is its ambition to arrive where it imagines itself to have started, at an absolute stillness beyond time.

It is in the midst of this patrol that the poet -- at ease with his sense of wonder, and yet made to wonder by his sense of ease -- calls upon his double, his dead master, to speak of what he "may not comprehend, may not remember." What, the poet asks his doubled self, are the timeless gifts to be derived from the recollection of all the windborne explorations in time through all the urban streets like

these? What lessons might I learn from a remembered ›history‹ of all those strange ›old men‹ -- those strange explorers so like my strangely doubled and redoubling self -- who are cut off from the timeless authority of the tradition-grounded Word, who have yet to reach the end of time, and who are thus consigned to toil in time, in ellipsis, ›between two worlds become much like each other‹? Surely my dead master, who is not just my double but the spectral double of all these strange explorers (including now *me*, the reader) as well, will have gathered something of permanent value from his recollection of all these explorations. Surely my (and every stranger's) spectral double can provide something I now lack, something that might establish some fixity of my being, something that might unite me with all these strangers in time, something that might help me endure the torments of time. Would the ghost please ›disclose the gifts reserved for age‹?

It is not a question that would or could invite a general theory in reply. That there is in this elliptical here and now no tradition and language capable of establishing authority, founding law-like general claims, laying down injunctions and prohibitions, and fixing the meanings and emotive force of things is the difficulty prompting the question. What the question calls for is a more pragmatic reply treating of matters of posture or attitude appropriate to this experience of living in ellipsis, this experience of the temporality of everyone, everything, every method of knowing oneself and others in relation to everything. To recall some of Eliot's own earlier writings, the question calls for a reply that does not so much bespeak but reenact and exemplify the intellectual virtue of *phronesis*: the intelligence and the virtue, according to Eliot's reading of Aristotle, that treats of both means and ends and that deals with the question of action under conditions of radical contingency which will not admit of experiential proof, fixed methods, or, indeed, any logic presupposing not only the necessity but also the

historical possibility of literal representation. And of course, the poet's spectral double does not misunderstand the question put to him. In reply, the ghost is "not eager to rehearse" forgotten theory whose purpose is always past. He does not describe, let alone explain, anything. He does not pronounce what history means. He does not posit any describable end in order only then to speak of right means of achieving it. He does not presume that he is accredited with a personal wisdom that would allow him to prescribe general maxims for conduct. Least of all does he try to *express* the poet's personal feelings in words. The poet's double knows too well what the poet knows: here and now *in history* where language is intrinsically problematic, all such representational statements will be troubled by the transparency of their historical contingency; as such, they will be incapable of conjuring an experience of a union of direct sensations, raw emotions, and dispositions to action spanning all the moments of estrangement in time that the dead master is called upon to recollect. Were the dead master to rely on representational statements, he could gather from these recollections nothing that could be thought permanent, nothing that could be received and valued as "gifts reserved for age."

Eschewing representational statements, Eliot's ghostly double instead acts. He acts to convene a scene of interminable *reenactment*, a scene that would have no boundaries, a scene that is more nearly a seance because through it every fragmented instance of estrangement in time can be afforded its chance to establish a timeless communion with every other. This scene is (re)enacted in language, it is true, but a poetic language in the service of a *constructivist* aesthetic and oriented to the task of producing what Eliot (in his essay on *Hamlet*) called an "objective correlative." It is posed, that is, in a language oriented to the task of evoking a particular emotive experience that might be repeated by any number of possible readers, no matter the describable ways in which they might differ; that would be

experienced by them in an unexamined attitude of utter immediacy and purest objectivity, as if prompted by direct sensations; and that is produced by the unmediated presentation of the "external facts," the situation, the objects, the chain of events, that readers will receive as instances of these familiar, direct, emotion-generating sensations.

The seance convened by the dead master in answer to the poet's entreaties has all these elements of an objective correlative. From it, it would seem, all historically identifying information is stripped away, so that no reader may find in it any basis for "personalizing" the scene -- for distinguishing who among imaginable writers in history might have authored the scene or who among imaginable readers might belong to it. And although it follows that no one is excluded from this scene, there is, in fact, no self-identical subject present *in* the scene > no protagonist with whom the reader might be expected to identify, no antagonist to oppose. There is only the ghost's description of -- one might say his testimony to -- a raw objectivity, arrayed as pure externality. The space of the subject, if subject there is to be, can only be filled by the reader, the reader now doubled, the reader called upon to experience in the manner of any number of equally estranged, equally haunted, equally dispossessed and windborne explorers the objective "external facts," the chain of events that the scene arrays. These are the "gifts reserved for age" that the ghost would disclose:

First, the cold friction of expiring sense
Without enchantment, offering no promise
But bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit
As body and soul begin to fall asunder.
Second, the conscious impotence of rage

At human folly, and the laceration
Of laughter at what ceases to amuse.
And last, the rending pain of re-enactment
Of all that you have done, and been; the shame
Of motives late revealed, and the awareness
Of things ill done and done to others= harm
Which once you took for the exercise of virtue.
Then fools= approval stings, and honour stains.
From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit
Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire
Where you must move in measure, like a dancer.

Now it is to be conceded that this ›objective= chain of events can be portrayed according to another register, as if voiced from the standpoint of a would-be timeless subject toward the end of depicting a universal predicament of man. Were one to rewrite this passage in such a register (as in the register of, say, Eliot's essay on Dante and Blake, whose themes this passage might be understood to repeat), it would become immediately evident that this arraying of objective events amounts to a general narrative of history of a very particular, yet very familiar sort. One might then say that this surely shows that Eliot was quite right to emphasize the third term in his description of himself as a ›classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and *anglo-catholic in religion*.= This scene, one might conclude, is Christian theology through and through. Accordingly, one might add, we could only relate to this scene as a contingency among contingencies: not as a gift that fills a lack, not as a gift we already *need* to receive, but as an alien text that would approach us from a position of exteriority, preach to us the necessary redemption of the individual, and, despite our historical differences, attempt to impose upon all of us a

timeless narrative of cultural reintegration and renewal.

Yet while the poetic lyric of this passage sometimes trips into flatfooted phrasings that would expose it to interpretations such as this, it must also be conceded that the very pace of the passage works to obviate every opportunity for the such interpretations to take hold. As testified to by the dead master, no event in this series has time to reach the reader via optical or aural senses, in the manner of a narrative conveyed by words. Before this can happen, every event in the array of objective events touches the reader via tactile sensations and negations of tactile sensation on the surfaces of the body. The tongue, the penis, the skin > these are the organs of sensing these events. Cold friction, tastelessness, impotence, laceration, rending pain, stings, and stains > these are the sensations (and negations of pleasurable sensation) that these organs feel. It is as if, upon experiencing these sensations, one were made to experience the torment of Christ on the cross without being afforded the slightest chance to think the question of Christ on the cross. One's body and soul are already beginning to be torn asunder. The dead master is already one's own ghostly other from whom one is already receiving a gift. With him one must already know that relief from the corporeal torments of life in time can only come with the restoration of the spirit in >that refining fire, where one must move in measure, *like a dancer*.=

>The complete consort [of words] dancing together= -- throughout the *Four Quartets* this image of the dance of words recurs, metonymically sliding between the image of the *mortal* beauty of the rose, on the one hand, and the image of the *eternal* fire, on the other. In *Little Gidding*, the choreography of a dance of words to produce an effect not of truth but of integral completeness (>where every word is at home, taking its place to support the others=) is figured as a way of bridging the insuperable distance

between the rose and the fire: between mortality and immortality, between life in time and the timeless being with which one seeks ultimate communion, between the experience of the historicity of self and things and the ever deferred end of being at one with the timeless source of the Word. It is figured as way of being in motion while still trying to be >at the still point of the turning world=- a way of trying to >conquer time= in the knowledge that >only through time is time conquered.=

Now, in history, one cannot seek comfort in the rose garden, the poem affirms, just as one cannot seek comfort in some inherited tradition. These are frail against the ravages of time. They die. The gate to the enclosed space of the rose garden, *Little Gidding* reminds, is >the door never entered= in the course of one's travels today. But from this it does not follow that one must postpone one's attempted communion with the absolute to the time that one's flesh perishes with time itself in the eternal flame. Now, here, nowhere, in the experience of ellipsis, the poem affirms, one *can* be in motion in time and still aspire to achieve some semblance of a fixed, complete, and weighty being that one might regard as one's home, one's point of departure, the place >where one starts from.=

One *can* try to achieve this through participation in a measured, self-measuring dance of words. One *can* so aspire even though one knows, once more, that every word and phrase one choreographs will >strain, crack and sometimes break, under the burden, under the tension, slip, slide, perish, decay with imprecision, will not stay in place, will not stay still.= One *can* so aspire even though one knows that one will always fail and always have to begin again the dance of words by which the effect of a place, a home is effected. One *can* indeed know and value one's determination endlessly to renew the enclosing dance of words -- this ever so mobile determination to always begin from this end -- as the one fixity, the one thing that is permanent and unyielding to time, the one thing to be affirmed in unison

with every other equally estranged subject, the one thing whose affirmation will make it possible to endure the rending pain suffered on the surfaces of whatever bodies and territories one performatively enacts and calls home. One *can* affirm this determination in the refrain that every estranged subject has already sung, the refrain that concludes the last passage of *Little Gidding* from which Ruggie's epigraph is borrowed:

And all shall be well and
All manner of things shall be well
When the tongues of the flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

One can, and one *must*. This *must* be one's posture. One's determination to respond to the historicity of self and things by participating in the endlessly repeated (because never finalizable, always failing) enclosure of life in time through the choreographing of a dance of words must itself already be determined, as if it were natural, necessary, beyond question, elemental to life. But how and by what is this ontotheological determination determined? To ask this question is to inquire into what might be called the constructivist power of the poet-narrator's encounter with his ghostly double. It is to ask how, working from circumstances of radical *contingency* in time, it is able not just to enact a posture but to elicit its repetition as a timeless postural *necessity*, a posture whose contingency cannot even be imagined, a posture that must *already* have been made one's own.

The answer, if answer there be, is that this crucial passage of *Little Gidding* works in concert with other passages and with the other *Quartets* more generally to determine this determination through

its own seductive dance of words in time. This poem, which would repeatedly intellectualize the fact of its own temporality, is above all an exercise in tempo. This poem, which would repeat that now and here in time it has nowhere to be and no space to call its own, is above all an exercise in time's spacing.

›Quick now, here, now, always= -- like the wind, the poem carries the reader who could pass for any reader along the pavement of a city that is nowhere and everywhere. ›Quick now, here, now, always= -- to read the poem is already to unburden oneself of everything one might claim as one's own so that one can be light on one's feet and keep pace. ›Quick now, here, now, always= -- one is already in motion, still in motion. But is one necessarily in search of that kind of motion that stills? One scarcely has time to think the question. One is already too busily involved in the search, already wanting to begin again the dance of words by which some sense of fixed, integral completeness might be achieved.

For no part of the poem presents itself as a stable tract, fully articulated and self-contained, where one might come to rest, come to know one's location, and then memorialize that location as one's recitable ground. What Virginia Woolf said of ›good modern poetry= can certainly be said of the *Four Quartets*: ›one can scarcely remember more than two consecutive lines from it.= Indeed, in the very act of trying to know and commit to memory any part of the poem, one discovers that one is already in motion beyond that part -- looking back, looking ahead, looking beyond the poem itself for something fixed and representable that will help one stabilize one's interpretations of whatever part one is in. One is necessarily in motion because every part is itself an ellipsis whose content consists of allusions to figures appearing elsewhere in the poem, in Eliot's preceding poems, in all the works to which his poetry alludes. Every part consists of allusions to figures that cannot themselves determine meaning because

they themselves allude elsewhere and beyond. Every part consists of allusions, then, to figures that represent nothing more, but also nothing less, than the permanent *necessity* of one's own tireless participation in the groundless, ever contingent dance of words by which one might try, but always fail, to determine an absolute meaning of a present that would contain all space and time within itself.

›From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit proceeds= -- so testifies the ghost in the seance he conjures. The exasperated reader, upon reaching this point, will immediately recognize herself in the words. The reader to this point has herself been proceeding from wrong to wrong through all the ellipses of this poem, ever attempting but ever failing somehow to trace from example to example of allusions to allusions in order finally to stabilize a meaning that the poem itself never articulates, never pauses to represent in words, ever leaves to the responsibility of an other who is only about to arrive.

Who is this other? Who is this double, so strange and yet the intimately familiar sovereign here? The text never says, but the reader need only look to herself in answer. It is me, my estranged and doubled self. I am the responsible other, responsible to my other who is not just my other but the double of every estranged subject. It is me. It is *we*. This posture is necessarily and permanently mine and ours, in communion with everyone and with the spirit of our history, here and now in this ellipsis that history always is. This determination ever to try again to begin again from some semblance of a complete, integral origin and representable ground -- this posture is the one thing that is permanent and unyielding in our lives, the one constant that I can recognize in myself and every other estranged subject who strives to begin again from the despoliation of our inevitably failed performances of bounded, grounded, pure bodily being. This posture is responsibility itself. This readiness to repeat this already repeated and endlessly iterable beginning and end is the fixture that makes possible not only an

experience of community with the poet and with every other estranged subject in history but also an experience of communion with the absolute, the eternal flame at history's end. This is what I and we must necessarily do if I and we are not to perish, like the rose, as subjects of this history. This is what I and we must *do* if, in time, I and we are to *be*. To know this, to know this as second nature, to know this absolutely, as the ethico-ontotheological principle that I and we cannot not know and obey, is already to have received the gift reserved for age. . . .

Interestingly, the epigraph, which appears in the *International Organization* article, is erased when that article reappears in Ruggie's collection.

The poem, as A. David Moody has noted, "does not state its ultimate meaning, or not in the form in which we are likely to look for it."

It would perhaps seem odd to regard any work of Eliot's as postmodern. Doesn't this subject of *Southampton* provide the eminently teachable (compared, say, to Joyce and Pound) entry to a modern English literary canon? Isn't not only the archetypal white male elitist conservative imperialist (and sometimes anti-semitic) literary icon but also the ur-rightsman of the modernist critical orthodoxy subject to deconstruction? Yes, and yes again. Still, many have pointed to "modern" tendencies in *The Four Quartets*, among them: its attitudes toward history and location; its self-conscious immersions in idiosyncrasies of language; its ironizing reliance on repetition; the accessibility of its allusions (as compared, say, to *The Wasteland* or *frock*); and perhaps above all, the deliberate transparency of its dependence upon allusion, always threatening to expose the vertiginously dizzying instability of meaning. Does this mean that Eliot, in his last major verse, was moving in a postmodern direction, whatever that might mean? Nothing of the kind. If anything, it demonstrates a point that the *The Four Quartets* would themselves enact, namely, the intrinsic inability of words, spoken in time, to effect timeless boundaries on human interpretation and conduct. It is important to keep in mind how easily Eliot slides between the names England and Europe, each term functioning to indicate an example recitable by and in the service of the other.