Journal of Textual Reasoning

Volume 4
Number 1 *The Ethics of the Neighbor*

November 2005

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Recommended Citation

Newton, Adam Z.. "Faces in the Textual Neighborhood: Two Poles and a Lithuanian." *Journal of Textual Reasoning* 4, no. 1 (2005): 65-80. https://doi.org/10.21220/s2-hz2r-bm81.

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Journal of Textual Reasoning 4:1 (November 2005)
ISSN: 1939-7518

FACES IN THE TEXTUAL NEIGHBORHOOD: TWO POLES AND A LITHUANIAN

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In the following essay "neighbor" means, severally, a near person, a near nation, and a near text. To the extent that what approaches can paradoxically hold itself at bay, the near one is also the strange one, uncannily present, proximate by dint of being removed from within.[1] But "neighboring" also designates the critical posture that brings affinities to light while allowing the interpreter to remain a determined exteriorist, faithful to the borders and the outside of any given textual encounter, sensitive to the uncanniness it both discovers and generates. Toward that end, the essay performs its own variations on what Julia Kristeva calls a "toccata and fugue for the neighbor" (*Strangers to Ourselves*, 1) and is adapted from my forthcoming book. Exploiting the midrashic

[1] The echo here is to Eric Santner's *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), which sketches an ethics of singularity in the form of "my answerability to my neighbor-with-an-unconscious." Against a background where "the very opposition between 'neighbor' and 'stranger' begins to lose its force," Santner depicts the neighbor as "the bearer of an internal alterity, an enigmatic density of desire calling for response beyond any rule-governed reciprocity" (9). My strictly textual sense of neighboring approximates the contours of that same tension.

paranomasia on "wilderness" and "speech," I export to the modern, secular genre of "*midbar*," a Talmudic formula derived from Tractate Eruvin 51a: "We learn 'place' from 'place', and 'place' from 'flight'; 'flight 'from 'flight', and 'flight' from 'border'; 'border' from 'border', and 'border' from 'beyond'; and 'beyond' from 'beyond'."

Midbar-ists are memoirists, displaced from East Central Europe and Eastern Mediterranean through vagaries of place, flight, border, and beyond; and re-situated, if not repatriated, on the plane of interpretation where they are paired as neighbors, on the model of Levinas's ethical relation between persons. In the present essay, the co-textual voices belong to Bruno Schulz and Witold Gombrowicz, who will first be linked as *prochains*, and then hinged once again by means of a third figure positioned to play the role of *tiers*: not coincidentally, that figure is the same Emmanuel Levinas, a closer neighbor to two Polish modernists than might be imagined at first.

Since the interpretive method of neighboring tessellates literary space with "territory" in its plain sense, it is thus entirely apropos that the two Poles and the Lithuanian-born Levinas neighbor each other geographically. Likewise, Schulz's and Gombrowicz's debut as literary modernists was roughly contemporaneous with the two early essays by Levinas that in this analysis will play lever to their common fulcrum: *De l'evasion* (1935) and "Quelques reflexions sur la philosophie de l'hitlerisme" (1934). It is equally fitting that the *midbar*-ists, in the context of their personal fates, both introduce a seam between nations and cultures, which become nearer or more adjacent to each other than is literally, physically the case. In other words, Poland and Israel (wholly inadvertently in the case of Schulz), and Poland and Argentina (very deliberately, for Gombrowicz), become neighbored as each other's aleatory Other, meeting somewhere just this side of each other's borders, drawing proximate while remaining self-determinatively at bay. It is this very paradoxical dynamic exquisitely captured by a phrase from Gombrowicz's *Diary*, "at a near distance," that will serve, finally, as the working definition for all three senses of "neighboring," interlaminating person, nation, and literary text.

The essay is broken down into six short "scenes." Scenes One through Four dramatize the neighbor as emblematized by a visage; Five and Six, as a country; and Seven, as a face revisited. To acquaint readers of the journal who may be unfamiliar with them, Witold Gombrowicz (1904-1969) was the author of novels, plays, an early collection of short stories, and autobiographical works. He was born on an estate at Maloszyce in southeast Poland, lived in Warsaw as a child, became stranded in Argentina on the eve of World War II, and returned to Europe in 1963 an internationally recognized writer, four years before his death. Bruno Schulz (1892-1942) lived, wrote, and died in the same small Galician town of Drohobycz (now in Ukraine). His two major works of fiction are *Sanatorium Under the Hourglass* and *The Street of Crocodiles (Cinnamon Shops)*, but he also composed numerous drawings and letters.

Gombrowicz exchanged a European nation he regarded as minor, green, and subordinate, for a Latin American nation in which he found only its mirror-image. Schulz remained stuck and cramped in Jewish Southeastern Poland in the 1930s and 1940s, the wrong place at the wrong time. The two authors knew and corresponded with each other, but as uncanny neighbors, mutually proximate and distant, even in life they seem to personify different rhetorical figures, a metonymic homelessness on the one hand and a metaphoric transmogrification of home, on the other.

Scene One. Society; Or, a Railway in Argentina

> That mug ten centimeters away. The teary, reddish pupils? Little hairs on this ear? I don't want this! Away! I will not go on about his chapped skin! By what right did this find itself so close that I practically have to breathe him in, yet at the same time feel his hot trickles on my ear and neck? We rest our unseeing gazes on each other from a very near distance . . . each person is curling up, rolling up, shutting, shrinking, limiting to a minimum his eyes, ears, lips, trying to be as little as possible. Their revolting, fat, veiny, droop, or dry properties fling me straight into the air, I feel as if I were leaping straight into the sky. I don't want this! This is an insult! I am insulted! . . . Too much. (*Diary* 1: 17)

Call this description, from Gombrowicz's *Diary*, a portrait of the accidental neighbor, that mug too unsettlingly close to mine. In that proximity, one discovers a dependent relation: a face becomes a provocation, and one must consequently grimace and generate a counter-face in return. A neighbor means a face, which, in turn, warrants a face-off. Of course, this is not face in its Levinasian sense as the irreducible mode of self-presence, the space or event of ethics; rather, it is face as *feature,* —those very facial particulars, the identifying (and repellant) marks, that in the aggregate constitute an assault.[2] For Gombrowicz, art also possesses a visage, and it stares or grimaces straight at its viewers, as demonstrated in this second scene set against the backdrop of Argentina's *Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes*.

Scene Two. Art; Or, Inside a Museum

> There were ten other people besides ourselves who walked up, looked, then walked away. The mechanical quality of their movements, their muteness, gave them the appearance of marionettes and their faces were nonexistent compared to the faces that peered out of the canvas. This is not the first time that the face of art has irritated me by extinguishing the faces of the living. Here in the museum, the paintings are crowded, the amount crowds the quality, masterpieces counted in the dozens stop being masterpieces. Who can look closely at a Murillo when the Tiepolo next to it demands attention and thirty other paintings shout: look at us! (*Diary* 2: 22)

It is the very near distance between artworks and the artists they metonymize as well as the human faces that metonymize them that leaves each individual artwork stranded or alienated in the act of being juxtaposed with its neighbors.[3] Elsewhere in the *Diary,* Gombrowicz writes,

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[2] Compare Santner's qualification of Levinasian *visage*: "In my understanding, this face is always 'distorted,' always marred by a pathological tic, a trace of *jouissance*" (88).

[3] On art as face or "faciality," see Silvia Benso, *The Face of Things: A Different Side of Ethics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), and the brief discussion of "aura" in the immensely influential essay by Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its

> Paintings are not meant to be hung next to one other on a bare wall, a painting is meant to adorn an interior and be the joy of those who live with it. . . .There exists an unbearable, degrading contrast between the *intention* of each of these works of art, which wants to be the only and exclusive one, and hanging the paintings all together in this room. Yet art, not just painting, is full of such marginal clashes, absurdities, uglinesses, and stupidities which we cast outside the mainstream of our feelings. (*Diary* 1: 23)

With the author's hint in mind, when such scenes as these are sketched in literary space, it is fair to speculate that they allegorize to one degree or another the author's keen awareness of writing in the presence of reading others. On one side of the divide, the façade of the writing Self; on the other, the aggregate mugs, reddish pupils, and tiny hairs of readerly nearness; and between the two, competing demands for attention, like those between Murillo and Tiepolo. And thus predictably for Gombrowicz, the ghosts haunting any literary transaction do not confine themselves solely to the neighboring and potentially agonistic presence of readers; such specters may also be fellow writers and fellow Poles like Bruno Schulz.

Scene Three: Neighbors; Or, Bruno Schulz and Witold Gombrowicz

> Before me I have Bruno Schulz in the French translation.
>
> Bruno.
>
> I have long known about this edition prepared with such painstaking effort, yet when I finally saw the book I winced. . . . He first showed up on Służewska, after the publication of Cinnamon Shops. He was small, strange, chimerical, focused, intense, almost feverish—and this is how our conversations got started, usually on walks. That we needed one another is indisputable. We found ourselves in a vacuum, our literary admirers were spectral. . . . After reading my first book, Bruno discovered

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Technological Reproducibility," *Selected Writings*, vol. 3: *1935–1938* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 101133.

> a companion in me, for which to furnish him with the Outside without which an inner life is condemned to a monologue—and he wanted me to use him in the same way. . . . And here is where the "miss" or "dislocation," to use the language of our works, came in; for his extended hand did not meet my own. I did not return his regard, I gave him abysmally little, almost nothing of myself, our relationship was a fiasco; but perhaps this secretly worked to our advantage? Perhaps he and I needed fiasco rather than happy symbiosis. To day I can speak of this openly because he has died. (Diary 3: 3)

As though Schulz's mug were ten centimeters away from Gombrowicz's own, the entry reads like the unextended hand beckoning a neighboring face only to deflect it apotropaically, thus turning away Bruno's "regard" in a double sense: as both concern or preoccupation, and sight or gaze. We have already glimpsed Gombrowicz grimacing in the (literal) face of exteriority. But there, in the train compartment, it was a matter of too much body too close for comfort. Here, the gauntlet flung, the face against which it slaps, belong to the compartment of authorial adjacency, the public nearness of two writers. And what of the face *in* Schulz, apart from its conjured simulacrum in Gombrowicz's *Diary*?

Scene Four: The Neighbor in Schulz

> It was the face of a tramp or a drunkard. A tuft of filthy hair bristled over his broad forehead rounded like a stone washed by a stream. That forehead was now creased into deep furrows. I did not know whether it was the pain. The burning heat of the sun, or that superhuman effort that had eaten into his face and stretched those features near to cracking. His dark eyes bored into me with a fixedness of supreme despair or suffering. He both looked at me and did not, he saw me and did not see. His eyes were like bursting shells, strained in a transport of pain or the wild delights of inspiration. (*Complete Fiction*, 47)

When we turn to Schulz's own work for glimpses of the neighbor, we discover a face that, conversely, poses less a threat or provocation or irritation than an appeal. The Schulzian face of the neighbor does what the Gombrowiczian face cannot. It does not flinch or recompose itself. Passively staring back or focused on an elsewhere—not grimacing or wincing or mugging—is how it stares back, with an exorbitance of

metaphor, the transporting of mimetic contraband that cannot otherwise be registered, as Schulz puts it in *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*.

At the risk of simplifying both their resemblances and their disparities, their neighbor-ness in all its fullness and dimensionality, Schulz and Gombrowicz draw near to one another in their mutual fascination with the facing, too-near or just far enough away Other; they converge, in other words, at a near distance. Something like that same uncanniness between subjects (whether that means the writers themselves or those figures each mimetically conjures up) carries over to a transpersonal realm. And it subtly alters the import of "near distance" while still bearing upon Schulz's and Gombrowicz's authorial fates, in the shadow of the larger-scale re-mapping of the face of Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean when fates were being decided. But in order to pivot from the neighbor as an alien but uncannily close face to the neighbor as a foreign but uncannily nearby country, a third scene needs to be staged. This one features Schulz's artistic legacy itself as the inadvertent cleavage—a joining as well as a splitting—between improbable neighbors projected onto national scale. It will be followed, for symmetry's sake, with its counterpart in Gombrowicz, who was last glimpsed, aptly enough, in an art museum.

Scene Five. Neighbors; Or, Villa Landau and Yad Vashem

In November of 1942, the Jewish ghetto of Drohobycz was liquidated.[4] Bruno Schulz met his end on the nineteenth of that month on Shevchenko Street (now Czacki and Mickiewicz streets), shot in the head by SS officer Karl Günter in a revenge killing for the murder of Günter's Jewish

[4] A photograph and description can be found at http://www.math.ualberta.ca/~amk/shoah/towns.html. See also http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/Drohobycz/maps_con.htm and the selection from the Drohobycz *Yizkor* book at http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Drohobycz/Drogobych.html, as well as the interview with Jerzy Ficowski *in Bruno Schulz: New Documents and Interpretations* that describes the Drohobycz Jewish community, 6768.

protégé, committed by Schulz's protector, Gestapo chief Felix Landau,[5] who oversaw the murder or deportation of Drohobycz's 15,000 Jews. Landau's name is also remembered because he had conscripted Schulz to paint murals of scenes from Grimm's fairy tales to adorn the walls of his five-year old son's bedroom. Schulz's last creative works, these flights of fancy materialized at the very moment that the town's Jews were being consigned to their death outside the Villa Landau, either massacred in the nearby forest of Bronice or rounded up for transport to Belzec in Drohobycz's *Umschlagplatz*.[6]

Nearly sixty years afterwards in February of 2001, the murals were discovered in a pantry of the converted Villa by a filmmaker from Hamburgand a former pupil of Schulz's. In May, Israeli representatives from Yad Vashem arrived and removed fragments of them (according to a Ukrainian-Polish commission, roughly 70 percent), transporting them to Israel. An anguished debate among Polish, Ukrainian, and Israeli authorities and partisans ensued, which reached even the editorial page of the *New York Times*.[7] As partially recovered, the murals now lie at a

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[5] The circumstances are recapitulated at the end of David Grossman's *See Under: Love*, trans. Betsy Rosenberg (New York Washington Square Press, 1990), whose second section mythologizes Schulz's "afterlife." Grossman alludes to it as well in his foreword to *The Collected Works of Bruno Schulz*, ed. Jerzy Ficowski (London: Picador, 1998), vii.

[6] The full account of Schulz's last days can be found in Ficowski's *Regions of the Great Heresy: Bruno Schulz, a Biographical Portrait* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003).

[7] Celestine Bohlen, "Artwork by Holocaust Victim Is Focus of Dispute," *New York Times,* June 20, 2001, A1, and "From a Mural, New Life in a Debate over Memory," *New York Times,* June 24, 2001, WK4; Eli Zborowski, Brad Hirschfield, Charles Chotkowski, Seth L. Wolitz, Suzannah B. Troy, "The Battle over the Murals of Pain" (letter to the editor) *New York Times*, June 22, 2001, A26. See also "Whose Art Is It Anyway?" *Time International* 158.2 (July 16, 2001): 24; Ian Traynor, "Murals Illuminate Holocaust Legacy Row, "http://www.guardian.co.uk/israel/Story/0,2763,515412,00.html; and Noah Adams and Linda Wertheimer, "Analysis: Controversy over Paintings by Writer/Artist Bruno Schulz Removed from Ukraine and Brought to Israel" (NPR's *All Things Considered*, July 9, 2001). The affair is covered meticulously by D. V. Powers in "Fresco Fiasco: Narratives of National Identity and the Bruno Schulz Murals of Drogobych," *East European Politics and Societies* 17.4 (November 2003): 622–53. See also the exchange of letters in the *New York Review of Books* between university professors and mostly Jewish respondents (including Aharon Appelfeld): 157.19 (November 29, 2001): 65, and 158.9 (May 23, 2002). In the wake of the controversy, Jewish leaders, museum professionals, U.S. State Department officials, and

permanent distance—or as Gombrowicz might put it, *amputated*—from themselves. Fragments will be displayed in a new Holocaust museum in Israel, and the rest will remain in Drohobycz, where plans have ostensibly been in the offing to turn the hundred-year-old villa into a museum in Schulz's memory.

In one of his most unembarrassed, importuning letters from 1934, Bruno Schulz writes of his need for friendship—the redemptive consummation that turns idiosyncratic whim into "reality when reflected in two pairs of eyes." In the light of his final pictures' fate, he might just as well have been speaking of the redemptive revelation now forever to elude them, partially defaced in the act of recovery:

> What was once a closed tight place with no further prospects now begins to ripen into colors in the distance, burst open, reveal its depths. The painted scenery takes on perspective and slides into real vistas; the wall admits us to dimensions formerly denied us; the frescoes painted on the vault of heaven come to life as in a pantomime. (*Letters and Drawings*, 54)

Where does this art belong and to whom? In the space where it was affixed, once Poland, now the Ukraine, to the municipality and the state? Spokespersons for the small remnant of Jewish Drohobycz answered emphatically in the affirmative, for they see themselves as a voice for a Jewish cultural legacy in Eastern Europe that survived Nazi slaughter, and yet lives on. As stranded objects, the murals thus serve belatedly as a quasi-gravestone. Or do the polychromes—damaged by salvage—belong, rather, in the place where survivors of the Shoah themselves sought refuge, and thus to the transnational inheritors of the Jewish state. Only in Israel, on the model of the survivors themselves, could those remnants be

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artists discussed issues of provenance in a forum on "The Legacy of the Artist: Claiming Jewish Cultural Property from the Holocaust," held in New York on July 16, 2001. Benjamin Geissler's *Bilder finden*, a documentary by the filmmaker who rediscovered the murals was first shown at Center for Jewish History in New York in 2002 and at Harvard University in 2003. "Harvard Death Fugue: On the Exploitation of Bruno Schulz," by James R. Russell in *Zeek Magazine*.

re-invigorated and given new life—gravestones still, but elevated, transported elsewhere.

Either way, the murals exist now stranded in two places instead of one, dislocated twice over, both formally and topographically, and in that very fragmentation, they articulate an improbable seam between the Villa Landau and Yad Vashem, Drohobycz and Jerusalem, brought close but still sundered dramatically: at a near distance. Part stuck in what was revealed to be always a half-embedded European life; part pried loose, ostensibly salvaged but no less and maybe even more extraterritorial—the frescoes are pieces of the same headstone, differentially marking a grave that now lies in two places, as, on the broken, jagged border of their fracture. Thus do Poland and Israel become unelected neighbors.

Scene Six: On the Atlantic

> Argentina! Sleep, squinting, weary, again I am searching for it in myself—with all my might—Argentina! I wonder, why in Argentina I never came upon this passion for Argentina in myself. Why is it attacking me now, as I leave it? My God, I who did not love Poland for a second. . . . And sure—I thought—surely this is nothing more than growing farther apart: not to love Poland because I was too close to it, to love Argentina because I always had it a certain distance, to love it now, yes, when I was moving, tearing away. . . Yes, and one can love one's past from a distance, as I am removed not just in time but in space . . . carried away, subject to the uninterrupted process of growing more distant, of tearing away, and, in this growing distance, consumed by a furious love for what is growing more distant from me. Argentina—the past or a country? (*Diary* 3: 77-78)[8]

Gombrowicz is writing this entry on a return leg to Europe in 1963 deferred for almost a quarter of a century, having last departed from it in 1939 when he left Poland for protracted exile in Argentina. There, he instantly found himself flung into foreignness: little money, few friends, no Spanish. Not wholly unlike the splicing of Jerusalemand Drohobycz,

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[8] Compare pp. 7475: "No, it's not that I loved her, but I wanted to have myself in love with her and apparently I needed desperately to get close to Europe in no other way except in a state of passionate intoxication with Argentina, with America."

Gombrowicz discovered a wholly unexpected ligature between his homeland and an adopted home, far away. And so, not only does March 19, 1963 when the author returns to Europe recapitulate August 22, 1939 when he leaves, irrespective of the twenty-four year interval. But also, in some fundamental sense, Gombrowicz is always departing from Poland, always arriving in Argentina, always returning eventually to Europe, now and forever estranged.

"What is Poland?" he asks, after all? "It is a country between the East and the West, where Europe starts to draw to an end, a border country where West and East soften into each other. A country of weakened forms" (A *Kind of Testament*, 53). What Poland teaches, Argentina re-teaches. Gombrowicz learns the same lesson twice in two countries an ocean away from each other that somehow effectively come to duplicate and replace each other; the lesson taught is *not to belong*, or at most to belong at a near distance to remain always and everywhere *in between* and to refashion oneself *as* and not just at the border.

If the neighbor in Scenes One through Four was a figure of surplus proximity, and thus a possible allegory for the vexed space of reading, in the two scenes above, the neighbor is that national or cultural Other which, though distant on the plane of geography, is forcibly or unpredictably brought home. As Poland and Israel share virtual space through the fragmentation and joint distribution of Schulz's murals, so East Central Europe and South America become each other's mirror and twin for Gombrowicz. And each retrospective or retroactive neighboring, albeit in different ways, poses the problem of national belonging for each writer. "Day by day," wrote Gombrowicz in the *Diary*, "my position on the European continent became increasingly precarious and equivocal." It is a far more certain and lethal doom that quickly caught up with Schulz, who in death became wrenched between topographies as he never was in life. Gombrowicz merely transferred that equivocality to another continent, as Argentina picks up where Poland left off.

At this argument's own transfer point, the pivot from neighboring persons to neighboring countries now turns back on itself, and so as not merely to retrace steps, "a third party" is now introduced to serve as the

pivoting apparatus itself. Since in his later work, Levinas will schematize that third party (or *le tiers*) as the force of collective, plural responsibility counterweighed against the strenuous aspect of the strictly dyadic face-to-face, he will personally be assigned that function here relative to the figures of Bruno Schulz and Witold Gombrowicz. And insofar as he joins those two Polish modernists as a similarly displaced person and *depays apres la guerre,* the choice is far from arbitrary

Indeed, it is uncannily apt, for it situates him at his own near-distance from his East Central European peers. Just as Lithuania, joined to Poland in a commonwealth since the sixteenth century, subject to successive appropriations by the Third Partition of 1795 and the German and Soviet occupations of World Wars I and II, remains Poland's immediately adjacent neighbor to the north and east, so Levinas remains proximate and even aligned with Schulz and Gombrowicz, though in ways neither of the latter writers could foresee. In this final section, Levinas's early philosophy will therefore be adduced to "read" uncannily the existential predicaments of Schulz and Gombrowicz alike.

Ten years before he fleshed out the concepts of the ethical relation and four years after he became a naturalized citizen of France, Levinas engaged Heidegger's phenomenological ontology by proposing an alternative notion of attachment-to-being at the core of selfhood, and the individual person's consequent need for escape or "*ex-cendence*" from it. Subjective being is felt as a weight or drag, an "irremissible" fixity that, consequently, generates the desire for *flight*. In 1934, Levinas penned a short article for a progressive Catholic journal that contemplated the clouds of Hitlerism massing over the horizon of Europe. Provocatively, Levinas analyzed the phenomenon as a crisis whose origins lay within transcendental idealism and liberal philosophy itself. In other words, both the subjective self and its projection as national and cultural body politic are seen by Levinas in parallel: self-irritated, unhappy from within, caught in a paradox of needful but impossible escape.

Extrapolating from a phenomenology of embodied identity to the conditions of state culture based on race and blood, Levinas saw in National Socialism an ideology that stood in defiance of the transcendence

discovered by the subjective self in its responsibility for the other man. "Chained to his body, man sees himself refusing the power to escape from himself" (70), that is, the power to be free and alone in the face of the world. Hitlerism signifies "an awakening of elemental feelings," a social order which in turn harbors a philosophy.

In *De l'evasion*, a less overtly politicized account of the human condition than we find in the article on Hitlerism (which preceded it by a year), modernity is seen once again as "tormented with problems that suggest, perhaps for the first time, that this concern for transcendence has been abandoned" (69) not because self and civilization are believed to be finally sufficient unto themselves (the Hitlerian mythos), but rather because a "deeper blemish," a "strange restlessness" at the root of being has made itself felt. Discerning it most emergently in the work of modernist writers, Levinas borrows his operative term—escape—from what he calls "the critical language of contemporary literature." He does not have Gombrowicz or Schulz in mind in these two essays that were written at the same time as the Polish writers first gained prominence. But they embody Levinas's turns of thought, uncannily.

To take the former first, what Levinas will call "everything recalcitrant in the state of being" (95) becomes in Gombrowicz's writing a desire for self-sufficiency that is ridiculed by the unruliness of the face to begin with, by its enslavement to one's own torso. An otherness infiltrates the root of a person's metaphysical integrity quite independently of any human Other, for any self-project is *already* undermined by the innate surrealism of the body. In Gombrowicz, subjectivity—what one cannot *not* observe, as the essay on evasion puts it—eerily aligns itself with Levinas's notion of a "need to depart from one's self, which is as much as saying the need to break the most radical and unpardonable confinement, the fact that the self is itself" (73). Moreover, the trope of "escape" itself peculiarly anticipates Gombrowicz' own inner (and outer) drive toward permanent flight, the need to be forever on leave, estranged. And both Gombrowicz, a Pole exiled in Argentina on the eve of war, and Levinas, originally Lithuanian, captured as a French POW in 1940 and liberated five years

later, will enact his own version of it after becoming unhomed in the wake of totalitarian conquest.

As to Schulz, long before it became a 21st-century American *faux pas* and before Poland became officially incorporated into the EU, "Old Europe" was a Europe that Levinas's two essays of the 1930s presciently interrogate, along with the weakened (if not worn-out) idealism that reflected it—the "worn-out" Europe Levinas lamented in his late essay, "Peace and Proximity." It is also the 0pt; Europe in which Bruno Schulz met his end in the death-mask imposed upon both his person and work by a Gestapo officer's bullet in 1942. When Levinas writes that the humanly physical, in its own terms, can reveal an absolute position, "an adherence that *one does not* escape" (68), he writes on the eve of the Nuremberg Laws, which set into motion the machinery that *interdicts* evasion—that finally catches up with Schulz even as he sought his characteristic form of escape in provincial Drohobycz. "The *pathetique* fortune of being Jewish becomes fatality. One can no longer flee from it. The Jew is ineluctably riveted to his Judaism": these sentences, from another Levinas essay written in the thirties, cast a harsh and exacting light upon Schulz's fate. Or, to borrow an apothegm from Stanley Cavell's essay on *King Lear*, "So phenomenology becomes politics."

A character is one of Schulz's stories says, "You are unburdened, feel light, empty, irresponsible, without respect for class, for personal ties, for conventions. Nothing holds me and nothing fetters me. I am boundlessly free." This, of course, was not Schulz's destiny. For all his universalist mythologic (Jerzy Ficowski's term), his literary cosmopolitanism, the "blemish" of particularity rooted him to the spot, as Levinas would say, "irremissibly." In this vein, Jacques Rolland, the editor of the 1982 edition of *De l'evasion*, appends a remarkable footnote that reads in part as follows:

> This dimension of existence glimpsed in the sense of being riveted, in the sense of its character as unpardonable or as irrevocable, was attributed in the introduction to its likely philosophical origin: the Heideggerian notion of *Geworfenheit*. We wonder, nonetheless, if it does not possess an entirely different origin: "Jewishness," in the sense that Nazi antisemitism has recently and brutally disclosed it, possesses precisely this unpardonable character. . . . Coming from a man who will later draw

> attention to pre-philosophical experiences which are the sap upon which philosophical reflection nourishes, this articulation of the fundamental underpinning of "pre-philosophical experience" cannot fail to capture our attention. (*De l'evasion*, 104)[9]

Nor can it fail to capture more or less precisely the fate of the chimerical and febrile writer, ineluctably riveted to a place and an identity.

Scene Seven: the Neighbor Revisited

I end my toccata and fugue for the neighbor with a final variation, borrowed, appropriately enough, from Kristeva:

> At first, one is struck by his peculiarity—those eyes, those lips, those cheekbones, that skin unlike others, all that distinguishes him and reminds one that there is *someone* there. The difference in that face reveals in paroxystic fashion what any face should reveal to a careful glance: the nonexistence of banality in human beings. Nevertheless it is precisely the commonplace that constitutes a commonality for our daily habits. But this grasping the foreigner's features, one that captivates us, beckons and rejects at the same time. From heart pangs to first jabs, the foreigner's face forces us to display the secret manner in which we face the world, stare into all our faces, even in the most familial, the most tightly knit communities. (*Strangers to Ourselves*, 3)

We have seen the neighbor in Schulz and Gombrowicz's writing as such a physiognomy, alternately a provocation and an appeal. We have seen it also as the accidental juxtaposition of cultures and countries, refracting Schulz's and Gombrowicz's very different providence as differentially de-

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[9] Rolland adds an important parenthesis: "(But being-riveted-to-Judaism nevertheless does not identify itself to that for which it would be the model, being-riveted-to-being. Why? Because it is positively election, which is to say service, but is thus already an ethical deliverance with respect to being as a 'trajectory.' This brings to mind a text hardly later than the period we are occupied with here, 'L'essence spirituelle de l'antisémitisme d'après Jacques Maritain' ['The Spiritual Essence of Antisemitism According to Jacques Maritain' in *Paix et droit* 5 (1938): 34]: 'A stranger to the world, the Jew would be its ferment, he would arouse it from its torpor, he would convey to it his impatience and his uneasiness for the good.' Fixedness, like tension, has for its object not being but the Good, which is to say, as the late work will teach us, that which, beyond being, is *better* than it.)" (1045).

Polanded Poles. We have seen it, finally, as the shared space Schulz, Gombrowicz, and Levinas occupy in the parallel or oblique ways in which selfhood is backlit for them by the vicissitudes of 20th-century history. All three modalities of neighboring are adumbrated in their respective writings by Schulz and Gombrowicz themselves, and though keyed to the meaning of "neighbor" in a conventional sense, what they say applies just as compellingly as a formula for the method of critical intervention at a near distance modeled here. And so, I conclude with them.

> I am completely alone in a desert. I have never seen people nor do I imagine that another man is even possible. At that very moment an analogous creature appears in my field of vision, which, while not being me, is nevertheless the same principle in an alien body. Someone identical but alien nevertheless. And suddenly I experience, at precisely the same moment, a wondrous fulfillment and painful division. Yet one revelation stands out above the rest: I have become boundless, unpredictable to myself, multiple in possibilities through this alien, fresh but identical power, which approaches me as if I were approaching myself from the outside. (Gombrowicz, *Diary* 1: 20)

When I approach a new person, all of my former experiences, expectations, carefully planned tactics, prove useless. Between me and every individual I meet, the world begins anew, as if nothing had been agreed and decided upon yet. How naive and obtuse is the scholastic, academic science of physiognomy that perceives a residue in a facial expression, a layering of multiple grimaces, mere muscle cramps. As if one had to mold expressions on faces, as if they were something else, just the grimace itself, a look, a penetrating talk, a passionate wink towards our perspicacity. (Schulz, "Letter to Maria Kasprowiczowa," in *New Documents and Interpretations*, 22)