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Roll a Hard Six: Losing Your Noodle in Raymond Federman's Double or Nothing

Raymond Federman's *Double or Nothing* is a convoluted representation of the mentally-unstable mind existing as a series of six characters that are at once separate and conjoined: the horrors and traumatic events of the narrative past dismantle the unified subject into a series of schizophrenic sub-personalities, parts of the destabilized Author's psyche, existing as separate fragments that eventually collide. Further, the imaginary room emerges as the Fifth Person, promising, but failing, to be a central stabilizer of the other fractured selves. Finally, the design of the text echoes the patterns of the traumatized mind, illustrating the inability of a narrative to construct a stable, unified subject and demonstrating the inadequacy of traditional narrative forms. The text, with its obliterations, cropped phrases, and pictorial manifestations, becomes the Sixth Person. However, in the end, the text shows that the past cannot be erased, explained, or reversed; neither can the experimental nature of the novel reach beyond the traumatized, schizoid subject to represent the horrors of the past that caused the Author's psychotic breach. Federman has rolled a hard six that will repeatedly fragment and unite, just as the traumatic past continues to repeat itself as one that defies representation.

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Raymond Federman's 1971 novel, *Double or Nothing*, is a work of avant-garde fiction, or, as Federman himself calls it, surfiction.¹ Although critical focus has been given to both form and content of the novel in terms of its commentary on production aesthetics, its place as autobiography, and its postmodern approach to identity, there has been little consideration of Federman's convoluted representation of the mentally-unstable mind existing as a series of six characters² that are at once separate and conjoined. The horrors and traumatic events of the narrative past³ dismantle the unified subject into a series of schizophrenic sub-personalities. The Reporter, the Noodler, and Boris⁴ are all parts of the destabilized Author's⁵ psyche, existing as separate fragments that eventually collide. Further, the room that the Noodler imagines emerges

¹ Federman defines "sursfiction" as "fiction that tries to explore the possibilities of fiction . . . that challenges the tradition that governs it" ("Sursfiction" 7).

² "Federman began to detect that actually there were not two voices in the book, but several potential others" (Oppermann and Oppermann 51).

³ The experience of the Nazi concentration camps is the main traumatic event. The remembrance of, and inability to comprehend, such an experience further traumatizes the subject.

⁴ These characters appear under various names in the text. I shall refer to the First Person as the Reporter, the Second Person as the Noodler, and the Third Person as Boris.

⁵ I will continue to write Author, with initial capital, when I am referring to the character, the Fourth Person, to avoid confusion with Federman as author.

as the Fifth Person, promising, but failing, to be a central stabilizer of the other fractured selves. Finally, the design of the text echoes the patterns of the traumatized mind, illustrating the inability of a narrative to construct a stable, unified subject and demonstrating the inadequacy of traditional narrative forms. The text, with its obliterations, cropped phrases, and pictorial manifestations,⁶ becomes the Sixth Person. By the end of the narrative, the inability to forget, or give meaning to, the trauma results in the characters' collusion into a blurry mess of dysfunctional multiplicity that is doomed to relive the fracturing just as the traumatic events of the past are relived in the unstable mind.

In the prologue of *Double or Nothing*, appropriately entitled "THIS IS NOT THE BEGINNING" (0),⁷ an unknown character – alluded to at the end of the novel as "The AUTHOR (that is to say to fourth person)" (np) – provides the frame story that introduces the reader to the three persons in the novel who form concentric circles of its schizoid self: the Reporter, the Noodler, and Boris. Initially, the Author appears to function as the external authority of the main text and as other to its characters.⁸ At the end of the novel, the Author reappears to remind the reader that the fiction has been constructed in every possible sense (listing the possibilities on the final page of the book) by him.⁹ Further, the Author reaffirms his right to separate himself from his own creation and avows his totalitarian control over the subject(s).¹⁰ Neither the narrative nor the characters can exist without him, allegedly external and supposedly authoritative, if he is not part of the fractured subject. Presumably, then, the Author should be able to recognize and delineate the mental incapacitation of the trio of the first three persons.

However, the Author of the prologue and end materials is not external, but is part of the same fractured subject as the Reporter, the Noodler, and Boris, and his authority over the narrative is dubious because the other sub-personalities are equally capable of taking control. Federman claims that reality "exists only in its fictionalized version. The experience of life gains meaning only in its recounted form" ("Surfiction" 8). This recounted form is the Author's own narrative. Thus, the main narrative is autobiographical for the Author, despite his tacit denial in the prologue. The Author attempts to separate himself from his traumatic past and the destabilized sub-personalities of his own psyche that are resultant of that unarticulated, and therefore nonsensical, past. The Author, rather than being an external other, is very much part of the "US" and "WE" that the Noodler repeatedly mentions. This is consistent with Serpil Oppermann and Michael Oppermann's claim that Federman's writing is "a process of creating potentially endless editions to the authorial self" (45).¹¹ The Author in *Double or Nothing* is one edition of the narrative self. Nevertheless, the Author tries desperately to distance himself (note that he is the *Fourth* Person) from the narrative and gain control over the fragmented sub-personalities through the act of writing. This is confirmed by Federman who affirms that "rather than being the stable image of daily life, fiction will be in a perpetual state of redoubling itself" ("Surfiction" 11). The Noodler's circling back to the start of his ramblings about the room at the

⁶ The text frequently refuses to follow the conventions of prose, syntactically, grammatically, and visually.

⁷ Note the peculiar pagination of the novel. The initial pages are paginated with increasing numbers of zeroes, before the Noodler's text begins at page 1.

⁸ For a discussion of the author being part of the book, and the relationship between text and author, see Roland Barthes's essay "The Death of the Author."

⁹ For a discussion on possibilities, potentialities, and the need for one to act to create realism, see Jean-Paul Sartre's lecture "Existentialism Is a Humanism."

¹⁰ The plural applies if one considers the three persons as separate subjects.

¹¹ Here, they mean Federman as authorial self.

end of the novel indicates that the Author (and his sub-personalities) is (are) doomed to repeat pathologically this self-fracturing *ad infinitum*.

Separate from, and yet part of, the Author, the First Person¹² in the main narrative is revealed as the Recorder, a “stubborn, middle-aged man” (*DON 0*)¹³ who “trying to be as faithful and precise as possible” (*DON 000*) documents the Noodler’s story, which the Author claims is “simply a matter of keeping track of” (*DON 00*). If the Recorder is a separate subject, his presence poses several questions. This is the only mention of the Recorder, for he becomes silent, not interfering with the action being recorded for fear of corrupting the so-called truth of the narrative. He is simply a recorder. Why, then, is this First Person required? Why does the Reporter exist at all? Why can the Author not accomplish this function himself? Part of the answer lies in emotional distancing. The inclusion of the Recorder provides one degree of separation from the main story, removing the Author further from the association with the traumatic past and the psychological breakdown of himself as a singular subject. The inclusion of the Reporter also helps the Author to dissuade the reader from believing that the text is autobiographical. However, as the reader is constantly reminded by the Noodler, “you can’t avoid the facts” (*DON 181*), suggesting that, in fact, the Reporter is one of the Author’s fractured selves. As is typical of schizophrenic subjects, the Author is “driven to search for the self yet liable to destroy the self in the act of searching” (Sass 23). The Reporter’s sub-personality appears to offer protection to the Author. Unfortunately, he is equally unstable and susceptible to the traumatic past. Moreover, he has no control over the narrative, for that becomes the task of the Noodler.

Why does the Reporter (or the Author, for that matter) want to do this reporting? The description of the Recorder as trying to faithfully record any story, his own or someone else’s, reminds the reader that there cannot be one truth or one past. Yet he needs to hear the narrativized account because it is the only way of giving meaning to the past that has separated him from the Author. The Reporter’s faithfulness to the Noodler’s story is paramount, for, as the Noodler states, there should be “Nothing to distract you. Complete concentration. I begin to understand what they mean by CONCENTRATION (concentration camps)” (*DON 67*). The trauma reasserts itself, not to be forgotten, even though it threatens to destroy the already fractured subject. And just as there is no direct textual connection between the Author and the Reporter, nowhere in the text does the Noodler converse with the Reporter. The Reporter has access because he and the Noodler are fragments of the Author’s fractured self. The perspectives of the Reporter and the Noodler have become completely intertwined. Referring to a schizophrenic mental fracturing of self, Louis A. Sass writes, “the decentered or fragmented self can be no less imaginary, and no less a product of what one might call the illusions of the *cogito*, than its opposite” (3). The Noodler inadvertently confirms this theory, insisting,

TO THINK IS TO SUFFER
TO SUFFER IS TO THINK. (*DON 144*)¹⁴

¹² A first person narrator tells the story from his own point of view. Yet this Reporter is supposed to narrate from a third person perspective, through the Noodler, who is the Second Person. Federman is noodling with traditional story-telling methods.

¹³ *DON* stands for *Double or Nothing*.

¹⁴ Here is one example of the refusal of the text to follow prose-writing convention. The chiasma is presented in full capitals and separated from the text.

Realizing the futility of his task, the Reporter hides himself behind the Noodler, just as the Author hides behind the text and his many selves.

The most active sub-personality is the Second Person, the Noodler, who moves the Author another degree away from the narrative while stepping closer to the cause of the psychotic break (the traumatic past) that he will confront in his fictionalized story. Typical schizophrenic tendencies are more readily apparent in the Noodler than in the Recorder or the Author. He is “paranoiac, irresponsible” (*DON 0*),¹⁵ an “inveterate gambler” (*DON 00*), obsessive compulsive (evidenced by his constant making of lists and attention to minutia), and emotionally stunted, unable to move past September thirtieth and face the reality/fictionality of the room on October first. The Noodler himself is trapped between the desire to bury deeply his traumatic experience (resulting in permanent mental instability) and his drive to find meaning by narrativizing it, which has the potential to either heal or deepen the psychological rift. The Noodler feels the threat of disintegration – “we must forget about that about the Jews the Camps” (*DON 181*) – and acknowledges it is “me again . . . Devour” (*DON 188*). Yet he also asserts

That's what makes life bearable

and to think of

to talk about it

to get it off your chest helps. (*DON 24*)¹⁶

The Noodler's dilemma illustrates the fear facing the Author: the disintegration of his mind. The Noodler takes up this fear for the Author and the Reporter, and tries to filter it through *his* narrative, onto the Third Person, Boris, providing another degree of separation from the traumatic past. However, he is unsuccessful as his mental instability is exacerbated by the logistics of being in the room for a year and by planning out Boris's story, and by doing so mere hours before he is to be isolated in the room. The Noodler is extremely susceptible to destruction because he is closer to the narrative than the Author or the Reporter.

Boris, the Third Person, becomes the main character of the narrative that the Noodler plans to (but never does) create. The Author tells the reader that Boris is a shy, nineteen-year-old immigrant from France whose parents and two sisters are killed in a concentration camp (*DON 0*) during World War II. These details are quite specific, presumably mirroring the Author's life, and consequently, those of the Reporter and the Noodler. Curiously, the Author writes that Boris has to “wait and see how he is going to be invented . . . to submit to the second person's imagination” (*DON 00000*), as if Boris exists before he is created. Furthermore, the Author insists that Boris can “disagree with [the Noodler], argue with him [but] the young man (very unsure of himself) has really no voice, at least initially” (*DON 00000*), speculating that Boris, at the very least, is living in the Noodler's mind before the Noodler writes the story.¹⁷ Subsequently, in thinking

¹⁵His paranoia is legitimized, in part, by the fact that he is being closely observed by the Reporter, whom he would experience as an external character. That is, the Noodler does not realize, as least initially, his connection to the Author or the Reporter.

¹⁶ This passage is an example of the Noodler's inability to contain the text within conventional lines; the breaking of lines emphasize his doubt about the text's meaning and its therapeutic use.

¹⁷ Of course, this is not unusual. Characters are often described as existing in an author's mind before writing

about Boris, the Noodler writes that he “Can’t use his real name” (*DON* 19), suggesting that this Third Person is or was a real person, perhaps the Noodler himself, perhaps even the Author or the Reporter.

More intriguing, of a character that is never actually created, is Boris’s self-realization prior to his creation. The Noodler writes, “[Boris] suddenly (almost as in a dream) became aware of himself . . . even though he did not recognize himself, it made him aware of himself at some different stage of life, of being someone else than what he was before the camp” (*DON* 136). Taking his identity a step further, Boris realizes that the character who will exist in the narrative as “Boris” (and who exists in the Noodler’s mind and is known to the Author) is somehow different than he used to be, prior to the traumatic experience that has fractured the subject into several sub-personalities. The Noodler claims, “Boris has a rather fuzzy idea of himself in his mind, and this is why he is so unstable” (*DON* 137). This suggests that Boris’s instability results from the lack of his character development in the text; he is an incomplete character in the Noodler’s mind. This shifts the focus of mental instability away from the Noodler, the Reporter, and the Author, and places it on Boris’s inability to recognize himself as a fictional singular subject that has yet to be created. By this point, the subject is completely fractured and unstable.

From the beginning of the narrative, the Noodler has a great deal of difficulty maintaining a line of distinction between his self and what he considers to be his created character, Boris. He aligns what will be his daily task of writing (and surviving) with the past/present/future life of Boris. According to the Author, the Noodler “decided to limit himself to the first year only so as to have ‘the time of the story’ correspond ‘to his 365 days in the room’” (*DON* 000). Early in the narrative, the Noodler is subtle about their connection. For example, after explaining his own involvement in a poker game, he writes, “He could do the same Have the same thing happen to his fifty bucks” (*DON* 28). And when thinking about the possible plots for his story, the Noodler admits, “I suppose I’ll have him do muchthesomething as I did” (*DON* 31). Such redundancies between an author’s experience and that of his character are not unusual.

However, even though the Noodler acknowledges that “it’s just a matter of not getting confused with what’s real and what’s not real” (*DON* 104) – and what’s Boris and what’s not Boris – the instability of his own self cannot help but be confused and he admits, “Boris will do the same eventually since he and I will coincide. It’s inevitable with us” (*DON* 189). Thereafter, the Noodler starts using first person plural pronouns throughout the narrative, collapsing the distinction between his and Boris’s thoughts, actions, and personas. Michael James Rizza indicates that in *Double or Nothing* for the “borders fixed between me and not-me, the line is porous simultaneously receding and advancing, shifting in accord with the various degrees of separation” (4). The Noodler is aware of this merging of himself with Boris, and sees it as problematic:

people
will
start
identifying me with him

that’s

commences. But the Author’s meaning is suggestive of Boris’s existence as a subject that is independent of the Noodler’s mind.

dangerous. (*DON* 48)¹⁸

Why the Noodler feels it is dangerous to be identified with Boris, by others, is unclear. Perhaps he fears that it will lead people to suspect his mental instability; it may also be part of his paranoia. Perhaps the Noodler's attempt to separate himself from the traumatic past through fictionalization will be undone if the reader learns that the narrative is autobiographical. The reader will be able to break the mirror through which the Noodler transfixes his story onto Boris. The Noodler writes, "If you look at yourself in the mirror as though you were somebody else . . . you can observe your own suffering" (*DON* 136), just as the Author, Reporter, and Noodler see their suffering through Boris. Furthermore, Boris's self-realization through the mirror collapses this externalization. The Noodler writes that Boris "sees himself in the mirror . . . A disgusting picture of himself" (*DON* 134), but, by the next page, it is the Noodler in the room, looking in the mirror. The distinction between Boris and the Noodler completely disintegrates.

Just as Boris seems to realize he has an identity of his own before he is created, he seems to have an awareness that his identity is unstable and collapsing with the Noodler's. As Sass reports is typical with schizophrenics, Boris "no longer feels himself master of his own thoughts" (4) and "may begin to feel as if his sensations and thoughts originated outside his own body or mind . . . or to feel actions, sensations, or emotions are somehow being imposed upon him" (16). Boris, as a creation of the Noodler, does originate outside his own body and mind. This is a clever manipulation on Federman's part, making commentary on the act of autobiographical writing as an attempt to separate the self from the real, while illuminating the failure of that separation, particularly when that self is traumatized.

Ultimately, the Noodler's and Boris's coupled identity incorporate those of the Author and the Reporter into the unstable, decentered subject. The Noodler simply writes,

you
he
we & the other too. (*DON* 129)¹⁹

The Noodler, at some point, recognizes that the four persons are, in fact, one subject, for when he considers isolating himself in the room he writes,

I TOO WILL LOCK MYSELF me and myself
me you I he all of us together ALONE. (*DON* 92)

Federman himself indicates that he intends the characters to be psychologically-unstable co-entities: "the people of fiction, the fictitious beings, will also no longer be well-made-characters who carry with them a fixed identity, a stable set of social and psychological attributes . . . [but] changeable, as unstable, as illusory . . . as the discourse that makes them" ("Surfiction" 12). This makes sense in context of the social instability and traumatic events experienced by

¹⁸ The collapse of the Noodler's mind, and his increasing separation from people and reality is illustrated by the shape of this text: the words disconnected from each other, "people" distanced from "me," the possibility of "identifying me" as being insane; the danger he feels, justifiably or not.

¹⁹ The Noodler's language has been reduced to its simplest form here, consisting merely of the sub-personalities. The text's reduction of language and its self-conscious consideration of the psyche is reminiscent of Samuel Beckett's reconfiguration of representation (see Davies).

Federman, and by the concept of identity by the literary culture of his time.²⁰ Although Oppermann and Oppermann suggest, “In multiplying his self into an infinite potential of fictional selves, Federman tries to come to terms with his past which becomes subject to a constant process of hermeneutical exploration” (60), this exploration seems doomed to fail in *Double or Nothing*. In connecting his collapsing self with the potentially-healing text, the Noodler writes (in a falling, arced line of single words),

I
 mean
 nothing
 in
 the
 past
 in
 fact

 the
 whole
 story
 is
 a
 break
 with the past (*DON* 48)²¹

and he repeats the word “HELP” fifteen times across page 78. However, before the Noodler can even begin his isolation, he, the Author, the Reporter, and Boris collapse into one and dissolve into nothing as the novel comes to a close before October first, and the narrative terminates without resolving anything. These four persons, fragmented by a trauma-induced psychological breakdown, collapse into one dysfunctional subject destined to repeatedly fragment and converge as long as the physical text of *Double or Nothing* exists.

In addition to these four persons, a Fifth Person emerges in the narrative. The room that the Noodler intends to inhabit for the 365 days is the center of all of the characters and the narrative despite the fact that no room exists; the room, as the Fifth Person, acts as an imaginary place of orientation for the fragmented sub-personalities. As Leslie Doris Trueman writes, “Even in the midst of psychic disintegration, schizophrenics have visions and dreams of the center, a symbol of wholeness” (ii). In *Double or Nothing*, the room becomes that center, a place “of self-realization” (Trueman iv). Indeed, since the subject cannot acquire a stable identity within his world, the room becomes the potential place of psychological and physical safety, a place in which he would be safe from external threats and from reminders of the traumatic past. As the Noodler writes, “THE NEED TO ESCAPE – extremely important” (*DON* 96). But even by just thinking about the room, the Noodler begins to see the problems with this safety mechanism. He

²⁰According to Sass, the “loss of the sense of volition and activity or the self’s unity, discreteness, or consistency over time” (1) are symptomatic of “the imagination of the twentieth-century avant-garde” (2).

²¹Indeed, this line physically breaks from the text, as it reveals to its readers that the line between truth and fiction is blurry, and that meaning is not only obfuscated, but multiplicitous.

ponders that people are “scared shit of their loneliness . . . they lock themselves in a crumby room . . . and try to spit out their lives . . . on paper, thinking that this way they will exorcise their inner-self” (*DON* 137). Here, the Noodler all but admits that Boris is his inner-self, meant to be exorcised in the room. And on some level, the Noodler realizes that the room is, in fact, part of his (and the Author's and the Reporter's and Boris's) psyche, stating, “Tomorrow morning that's it you enter into the nights of your skull . . . into the chambers of the mind” (*DON* 4). The imaginary room is the Fifth Person who keeps the traumatic past and, therefore, the key to either psychological re-integration or total destruction.

Although Linda Hutcheon states that “the narrating figure is the centre of internal reference” (51)²² which, in the novel, is the Noodler, the room becomes the potential source of internal reference for the decentered, fractured subject. As the Noodler avers, “the Room is at the core of the whole thing” (*DON* 101). Richard Pearce's assessment of surfiction supports this conclusion, for he states that “the narrator is no longer situated between the subject and the reader, he no longer stands on a fixed vantage, and he no longer encloses the subject within the frame of his visual imagination” (48). Indeed, the Noodler, as narrator, wants to remove the subject (and its fractured parts) from his imagination by entering the room. He states, “October 1st and goodbye [sic] world” (*DON* 4). The room, if it were entered, would become the internal self (the central mind) and the external manifestation of the mind (as a physical place) that together provide what Sass refers to as “a systemized delusion that overcomes the chaos and disintegration” (17). The room, as it is anticipated by the Noodler, provides an escape from the outside world, real or imagined, the impending self-isolation potentially protecting the subject from reality and from the past trauma.

Nevertheless, the room remains a delusion that cannot keep the past or mental illness at bay indefinitely because the novel never moves past September thirtieth. The room never has the chance to perform its potential role as a healer or a stabilizer because it, like the other characters, has a multiplicity that is dangerous:

the camp
the room
together (*DON* 129).

The isolation provided by the room might satisfy the Noodler's insistence on having “Nothing to do with the outside world” (*DON* 37), but he admits, “it's there in the background and will always be there Can't avoid it even if you want to THE CAMPS” (*DON* 39). The room, therefore, is haunted by the traumatic event that resulted in the fracturing of the subject. Even though the Noodler tries to convince himself that it is “JUST ANOTHER ROOM – a room. without a meaning. just a wasted room” (*DON* 22), there will always be “moments of panic” (*DON* 9). In fact, there is “A STATE OF SIEGE SIEGE IN A ROOM (!)” (*DON* 4). The room, as the Fifth Person, is just as unstable as the other sub-personalities.

Furthermore, the first page of the Noodler's story visually identifies the room as the all-enclosing container, the page being encompassed by the four walls of the imaginary room from the beginning of the narrative. The room's design, as imagined by the Noodler, mirrors mental instability, with boxes of noodles symbolizing *the* noodle, as well as the potential for the collapsing of the noodles (the fractured selves) onto each other, just as the boxes could physically

²² Here Hutcheon refers to *Double or Nothing* as a narcissistic narrative, “narcissistic” being a “descriptor of engaged self-reflection” (xi).

collapse onto the Noodler. Anne-Kathrin Wielgosz concurs stating that “the spatial displacement of noodle boxes demonstrates not merely a ‘removal of a thing from its place’ (‘displacement’), but a complete collapsing of (the concept of) stability” (103). The room itself suggests the inner conflicts with which the Noodler is wrestling: his obsessive repetitions, his lists and numbering, his fears and paranoia, his inability to carry out a plan of action. The contingencies for which the Noodler plans on September thirtieth illuminate the subject’s traumatized mind, while threatening to reduce the mind to nothing. And because the Noodler never enters the room, none of the decentered selves overcome their psychological disintegration before they are obliterated by the ending of the text itself and made into a catalogue of topics at the end of the book, an act of psychological compartmentalization (and disengagement) by the Author.

Just as the first page of the narrative reflects the room as an unstable mind, the entire text reinforces the representation of the unwell mind and the traumatic disturbances that Federman constructs in his narratives, and should be considered one of the parts of the fragmented schizoid mind, the Sixth Person. Pearce agrees, stating, “The medium, instead of being suppressed, asserts itself as an independent and vital part of the subject” (56). The use of the text as part of the multiple subject functions in at least two important ways. First, the text, as the Sixth Person, becomes what Hutcheon calls “the omniscient ‘authorial’ narration . . . becomes a potentially useful self-reflecting device . . . as a mediator between reader and novel world” (51). Since the other narrators within the text (the Author, the Reporter, and the Noodler) are mentally unstable, the text asserts itself as encompassing the narrative and its narrators, “expos[ing] the *fictionality of reality*” (“Surfiction” 7). But the text is itself unstable,²³ from a traditional perspective. The reader cannot read this text as one traditionally reads fiction. The experimentation with narrative perspective, subjectivity, linguistic fragmentation, and visual manipulation; the focus on the creation of the text; and the placement of the text as a character itself, illuminate Federman’s position that “To create fiction is, in fact, a way to abolish reality, and especially to abolish the notion that reality is truth” (“Surfiction” 8). If the text is a fictional character, then mimetic representation of reality is impossible. Indeed, “The typological pulverization of language points to the fact that the historical truth defies representation” (Oppermann and Oppermann 47). This is certainly the case in *Double or Nothing*. The narrative past that has caused the fracturing of the subject into six continues to defy representation despite the efforts of the first five persons, and despite the existence, and as a result, of the fragmented text.

Second, the text functions as a link between the Author and his text, illuminating the inadequacy of traditional narrative and textual production. If, as Oppermann and Oppermann suggest, “the novel turns into a kind of dialogue between the writer and his text” (46),²⁴ then one can consider that the Author is working through his own traumatic memory within this non-traditional book form. The visual presentation of the stories in the novel reflect the Author’s (and consequently, the Reporter’s, the Noodler’s, and Boris’) crisis of representation of that which cannot or should not or will not be represented: the nonsensical horrors of Nazi concentration camps. Indeed, Wielgosz states that the inadequacy of the text, at times, prevents the Noodler from writing anything at all: “For the Second Person the concepts of past and temporality must reveal themselves and can only be designated as (blank) space” (93). These blank spaces represent “the crisis, the obsolescence of history and temporality” (Wielgosz 93), and, I would argue, the obsolescence of the singular, stable subject. Furthermore, if, as Oppermann and

²³ Wielgosz refers to “the decomposition, the destabilization, and the distortion of the conventionally prescribed positioning of words on the page” (92).

²⁴ Again, they are referring to Federman as author.

Oppermann suggest, “The complex interplay of narrative voices mirrors the novel’s mode of production” (51), the converse may also be true: the novel’s mode of production mirrors the multiplicity and instability of the narrative voices that represent a single subject, the Author.

Double or Nothing is a complex representation of the mentally-ill mind fractured into at least six persons and re-assembled into an unstable multiple subject that is ultimately unable to find a path of recovery through textual representation. The Reporter, who barely ekes out an existence in the text, the Noodler who cannot step past his obsessions and compulsions beyond September thirtieth, Boris whose confused immigrant/survivor identity cannot recognize itself, and the imaginary room functioning as the centrality of the sub-personalities all succumb to a common dissolution on the page, which itself, as the concrete re-enactment of the Authors’ psyche, fails to restore the singularity of the traumatized subject. The past cannot be erased, explained, or reversed; neither can the experimental nature of the novel reach beyond the traumatized, schizoid subject to represent the horrors of the past that caused the Author’s psychotic breach. Federman has rolled a hard six that will repeatedly fragment and unite, just as the traumatic past continues to repeat itself as one that defies representation.

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