

Per 1.1.

Per is a preposition which signifies a range of things in Latin, including through, across, along, along with, all over or throughout -usually with a notional movement across a boundary in space but also time. So what might be the form of a per?

I don't particularly enjoy playing etymological games, so be prepared to entertain the aporetic abyss. Pope John XXIII offered the following words in anticipation of his death in 1963: "Any day is a good day to be born, any day is a good day to die". The Latin renders "to be born" as *per nacere*, which really means in/on which to be born, to emerge or to begin. What is the form of per here? How would I render this movement in time or place?

I'd broaden the preposition towards the closely related Sanskrit *pari* and then *parikrama* which describes a walking through or circulatory passage, a meditative walk or pilgrimage. Or, I'd broaden towards the Greek *eis* which "signals a general movement towards something" but can also convey "to believe in" or have "faith in". The former conjures *para*, meaning foreign or alien, "an experience of which thus brings into play the knowledge of the other". "To believe in" tends to the opposite, conveying movement inward towards certainty, blinding faith or mythemes of origin.

I want to avoid being trapped in a single event: performance, birth even notional ends of time. The latter quality of "messianic time" is nicely characterised by an Italian theorist with the phrase "immobile anaphoric gesture". To break out of its circling finitude: the specific reliance on something that came before, the anaphoric, is what is at stake in the form a per. It involves capturing and extending nowness into active change or transformation: futurity.

Let me take this seriously enough to focus on the aporetic example of Antonin Artaud. Artaud whose work was a kind of proto- as well as final performance art. How can there be performance after Rodez? Or explicitly after *To have done with the judgement of god*: his cries and broken-down language, his reduction to a staged silence or the silence of his death in 1948? Artaud the "unique", *Le Môme*, Emperor of Glossolalia, sometime poet of the "holes of being"?

I will answer in the form of a per. In the words of a witness who has been able to extend, convert and create in and with the void so precariously shaped and enacted by Artaud.

Artaud lived dangerously, maintaining his subjectivity "in crisis", according to a Bulgarian theorist. She came to Artaud through Paule Thévenin whom, she says, "gave living testimony to his work." The question that remains in such testimony is: when is the event of witness? Is it triggered in the beginning or is it in the telling and when is the telling complete? "All witnesses are false. That's why I'm so uneasy", Paule said on film just before her own death in 1993. "I feel that I could be a false witness, too. I'd hate that. I'd really dislike that." In 1986, she'd written in a letter of fierce precisions: "It all began with my first meeting with Antonin Artaud".

Facts are not the whole point, even for a 'true witness' and Paule knew that well. She was not merely Artaud's executor or biographer but friend, crisis-recorder, decipherer, transcriber, interpreter: a supremely loyal witness who knowingly served his work with her life. Soon after it began it was "pronounced ... written ... definite" that "for me to get to know him, would take even longer than my own life." For years it was necessary to work anonymously and it defined "almost every moment" of her existence. "It's as if my life had stopped at one particular moment in time, as if I had stopped time."

This latter is a common construction of witnesses to an extreme event, in her case the potent actuality of Artaud's "breathing", in others genocide, for example. Always there is a need to recapture the nowness of the event with an exigent language. Paule writes that "not even death would know how to quench the ardour that Antonin Artaud left me", which is only to repeat the same thing: the work is never done.

In witness time begins.

Per 1.1.

I began with Antonin Artaud's *Collected Works 1-4: English-language volumes published by John Calder in 1970-6*. Those and *Artaud le Môme*, a pamphlet published by Black Sparrow Press in 1976. Stephen Barber's biography from 1993, *Blows and Bombs*, is slim but essential - as is *Wachtfreunds and Rack Screams: Work from the Final Period* [Exact Change, Boston 1995].

The Italian theorist is Giorgio Agamben and references are to *The Time That Remains* [Stanford UP 2005]. The Bulgarian theorist is Julia Kristeva whose 'The subject in process' [1972] centred on Artaud, who reappeared in *Revolution in Poetic Language* [Columbia UP, New York 1984].

Paule Thévenin has not been widely translated into English, but I refer here to her Letter to a Friend [Canadian Fiction Magazine Winter 1971] and her essay on his drawings, 'The Search for a Lost World', in *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud* with Jacques Derrida, MIT 1986. She is impressive in *The True Story of Artaud the Momo*, a documentary by Mordillat/Prieur from 1993.

Beyond that is Thévenin's life work in the 14 volumes plus supplements of the *Coeuvres Complètes*: Beyond those are her own writings collected in *Antonin Artaud, ce Dées-pere qui vous parle* [Paris 1994]. The Bibliothèque Nationale published a rich Artaud archive in their *Antonin Artaud* [BNP/Gallimard, Paris 2006] and Artaud inspired a recent exhibition and catalogue *Specters of Artaud* at the Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid Spain in 2012.

My source for this construction of *para* is the Indian theorist and tribal activist Ganesh Dey's *Swa & Para: Self & The Other* in his *Of Many Heroes* [Orient Longman, Mumbai 1998].

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Per 1.2.

When is the event of witness? Witness equates with testimony: breathing word of what has been seen, heard, experienced, or doing so on behalf of event-victims. "Primo Levi is a perfect example of the witness", wrote the Italian theorist while describing an "unease" that Levi bore, as witnessed himself at the offices of Einaudi. This "unease" was the Auschwitz-survivor's burden of unceasing witness. Here witness earns its Greek derivation in martyr: martyrdom to an event that never ends, or endlessly begins in witness.

Having missed the Nuremberg Trials Hannah Arendt wanted to report on the trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem, 1961. It was "an obligation I owe my past" and anyway a chance to see "these people in the flesh". More precisely, the event that she witnessed was the drama of a trial and judgement, "eighteen years" after the events that triggered it had ended. The book of her witness generated another event and martyrdom, to which I now bear witness. This is the temporal structure of witness.

Hannah lambasted the event as a show-trial, a propagandist melodrama which gave her significant unease. Unease at the banalities of the flesh and "clownish" impoverishment of the words it owned. Unease at the tanks, ideological songs and Golda Meir's private declaration that she'd replaced faith in God with "faith in her own people" -while shortly to deny the existence of an indigent Palestinian population.

In contrast to Hannah, I bear witness to the need for a corrective event to bring responsibility for the genocide in Europe home to a complacent and complicit world. But I share Hannah's distaste for a Prosecutor whose aggressivity came to define the state he represented -if not the victim's whose breath he claimed. An aggressivity I've also witnessed throughout my life.

"A trial resembles a play in that both begin and end with the doer, not with the victim," Hannah wrote. The victims remain silenced but the doer eagerly confessed his role in hours of pre-trial tape recordings. So: "after the tape recorder had addressed the court, the death sentence was a foregone conclusion." It was a sentence she agreed with, despite her diligent discovery of evidence that Eichmann and/or his defense had "forgotten" and replacement of the court's judgement with her own.

Hannah's witness is human, all-too-human, an event and time of beginnings. Her judgements are still wrestled with, years after the self-righteous vilification she received for engaging ethical categories of human experience honestly. She scoffs, for example, at a German army physician's claim that protest was a "practically useless sacrifice" because totalitarian regimes did not "permit their opponents to die a great, dramatic martyr's death for their convictions." Hannah drew a contrasting political lesson: "under conditions of terror most people will comply, but some will not."

While she had rightly criticised the prosecutor's theatrical extension of Eichmann's crimes across millennia, Hannah broadened her own witness to tell of countries, peoples and individuals that stood up to the army physician's regime -notably Danes, Swedes, Bulgarians, and Italians. "'It could happen' in most places, but it did not happen everywhere. Humanly speaking, no more is required." This journeying towards the other is the form of a per.

Pope John XXII's "Any day" signified a literal acceptance that Thy Will Be Done and refusal even to think in the future tense. How does it relate to John Cage's affection for the Japanese Zen Buddhist mantra: Every Day is a Good Day? His appreciation of an everyday stripped of intentionality, his invocations of chance? Simply, speaking of nothing required something, his three movements of silence [4'33"] revealed the "theatre we happen to be living in", and bore an anaphoric but also generative relationship to non-silence: the sounds to come.

Even Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, or Pope John XXII, countered his closed "faith in" with the dynamic, even political, form of a per. Early in his short Papacy, he asked the Vatican's electricians, who were installing new phone lines, how things were going. He was so startled by their testimony about the Vatican's starvation wages and long-established conditions that in 1959 he ordered rises of 25-40% for the lowest paid, along with tax-free shopping and subsidised housing in Vatican City.

In witness time begins.

Per 1.2.

The Italian theorist here is also Giorgio Agamben; I refer to his *Remnants of Auschwitz* [Zone Books, New York 2002]. He refers to Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* [Vintage, New York 1963] as do I, along with *Men in Dark Times* [New York 1968]. Elizabeth Young-Bruehl's *Hannah Arendt For Love of the World* [Yale UP New Haven 2004 edition] is the best reference for her life. Seyla Habib's essay, 'Arendt's Eichmann in Jerusalem' from *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, [Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2006] is notably good.

References to John Cage come from his *Silence* [Marion Boyars, London 1968] and *Every Day is a Good Day: The Visual Art of John Cage* [Haywood Publishing, London 2010]. Reference to Pope John XXIII originates in *His Name was John* by Alden Hatch [Harrap, London 1963]. However, it was triggered by Arendt's essay 'The Christian Pope' from the *New York Review of Books* in June 1965. The controversy over her Eichmann was still alive with strenuous efforts to discredit her research, authority and person. The essay triggered an amusing letter-page challenge and corrective from Arendt: "Mr. Steinberg is mistaken": <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1965/sep/16/john-xxiii-2/>

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Per 1.3.

We sit inside silence, the two of us.

We've come to rest around a table. A ritual involving food is underway. We are safe in a place we both know and have previously filled with words: his home and studio. He is an eager conversationalist: wielder of words, stories, song, highly tuned gossip and I am here to tell stories, ask questions and listen to answers.

Our silence is contingent: full of voice, words, outrage, anguish, difficult truths, stolen breath -all of which remain potential. We are not merely speechless, but stripped even of the approximate tools of human language and law.

An hour earlier we had formed the small audience at a peculiarly immersive performance. When we arrived, the stage was already dressed: a section of dual-carriageway with a stack of burning tyres, small roundabout, length of wall, towering tree canopy. A foreshortened row of wooden structures precisely fire-blackened: one here, one there, none, then three together. The cast and crew were in place and got to work as we mounted the middle of the stage, in a small vehicle more or less integral to the performance.

Quickly, at the furthest end of the vast stage we watch as a commandeered truck is parked across the opening before being set alight. Nearby, on another screen in the remaining gap, another vehicle explodes into flames. Off to my right and rear, stage-handlers are pulling whatever they can find: wooden market trolleys, big rubber tyres, the contents of various workshops, into more heaps and setting them on fire too. Through the nascent smoke two of the principals in police uniforms with regulation guns are still visible at the theatre's main entrance and exit.

Stationary, we're trapped in our excellent seats with a radio relaying carefully synced performances taking place elsewhere in a daring and tightly-scripted production. Otherwise we watch 30 members of a youngish chorus gather at the side of the stage, two metres away, beside the smashed and burned facade of a boutique. They are themselves aflame; skin shining, eyes fueling the flames that surround us all. They do not speak but watch and wait with poise, radiating absolute faith and undoubted command of their realm.

It is an astonishing performance: the fruit of a lifetime of longing, a millennium of desire. This is it, the time is now, everyone knows their role and performs flawlessly. The unnerved audience, however, has departed with squeaks of rubber on actual tarmac. We alone remain, until one of us suddenly yelps recognition of an unblocked opening at the side of the stage. Fire Exit. The drama is not about us, we are superfluous to it, so steer towards the gap and flee along a passage with carefully-laid obstacles. All other exits were blocked with flaming vehicles or those smiling policemen 'holding' the route out of town.

This is the scene at which three men are burned alive in the neighbourhood mosque. It is March 1st 2002, the place is Manjalpur, near the ring roads on the outskirts of Baroda, Gujarat, India. Three of a thousand Muslims murdered, many tens of thousands displaced in a carefully planned act under the blatant, nearly vocalised, protective approval of the state authorities. Political 'leaders' inspired by the largest scale of 20th Century crimes, blinded by faith in the mythic origins of their narrowly-defined kind.

It had been a long time coming but the time had come to drive out the other by death or fire. Somehow, the otherness in the car and around the silent table: a celebrated artist, openly gay, and myself, an obvious Foreigner, escaped their notice. The main production ran on for several days, during which I was trapped elsewhere nearby under the black smoke and a military curfew. The killing ran on and on and a year later death claimed you, my fellow-witness, too.

Law and language fail to address or narrate the justice or truth of the event witnessed, of course. Each iteration, a necessary responsibility, repeats these inherent failures but recommences the time of witness. The time of the witness-event is now. This is what it means. The only way out of the immobilising circle is to invent a form of the per: to make something in its place that will move through or across boundaries of space and time. A condensation of what is available: some words to shape and hold a void in the poetic.

In witness time begins.

Per 1.3.

Notes

Excerpts from my journals of these days were published as 'While Baroda Burns' in TANK magazine, London 2004.

Otherwise, the best of many existing books on the state-sponsored massacres through-out Gujarat in 2002 is edited by Siddharth Varadarajan: *Gujarat: the Makings of a Tragedy*. Fenguin. New Delhi 2001. It is worth reading Raj Kamal Jha's novel, *Fireproof* [Picador, London 2007] which is a sincere if problematic attempt to render these events from 'inside'.

Look out for Edward Simpson's forthcoming book on Gujarat's 2001 earthquake [The *Political Biography of an Earthquake*. Hurst, London August 2013] and the abuse of [re] development processes to promote the same politics of Hindutva that generated the massacres in 2002 under the same political leadership.

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in
witnesses
testimony
before
judges