

## **Art: Enactment, Presence and Prophecy**

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### ***The Writing on the Walls: Literature and Theology for this World***

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*"Art is the only twin life has ... art does not seek to describe but to enact."*

(Charles Olson)

In his essay, *Human Universe* (1950-51), on the real work of poetry, the early C20<sup>th</sup> American poet, Charles Olson, sought to question convention and the received rhetorical structures of poetry; to, in effect, 'wild' language and thereby return to it the immediacy of experience, process and change. By so doing he conceived human creativity as *acting* empathetically within the wild energy of the Cosmos. Olson's term 'to enact' is analysed here alongside Jean-François Lyotard's formulations on art, specifically those made in the essay, 'Scapeland' (1989), in the terms of the *event* and the *figural* as indicators of a re-wilding of meaning freed from society's grand narratives. Referencing Maurice Blanchot's essay, 'The "Sacred" speech of Hölderlin' (1949), consideration is also given to the poet-artist as prophet. Using the example of Hölderlin's last poems, prophetic language unfolds to a point where *to enact* finds a natural conclusion in the poet's non-being.

In this paper art practice, creative writing, and theoretical analysis are interwoven to establish a new metaphysics of enactment amongst complex social, political and cultural contemporary narratives. Nature is the place or common theme that is at the core of this paper, and where the wilding of language begins.

Rovaniemi, 17th February 2003

It is another damp, overcast day with rain, occasional snow flurries, and a bitter north-easterly wind that blows through my clothes and through the city. The cold forces everyone I see to draw into themselves and to rush, head down, to wherever they are going – although there aren't that many places to go here. Today, I went inside the library that Alvar Aalto designed; the building we saw from the outside when we were here before. The circular window lights embedded in the pure white ceilings are wonderful. They are like eyes: portals between the silent body of the library and the changing sky and ether beyond. Aalto's was such a visionary plan for a city destroyed by the German army as they retreated into Norway. His blueprint never quite became reality, though, apart from the library and a couple of other public buildings. Instead, Rovaniemi is now a collage of domestic and corporate styles laid onto a Modernist grid. This afternoon I chose to walk towards the southern suburbs and forests of Rovaniemi, in an area I had so far avoided during my stay here. I paused in that drab concrete underpass where we stood for a while last year. It seemed then, and still does now, a forlorn space set at the limits of both the cheerless urban landscape and the encircling forest. Aalto's optimistic scheme for the town clearly never reached this spot. As I stood in the underpass, I could recall your voice as you read out loud a graffiti dialogue between two unknown individuals that had been crudely sprayed onto the underpass wall; both texts inscribed on a massive scale. "We're all going to die!" one proclaimed, to which someone had responded, "Oh Fuck!". Both the prophecy and the equivocation remain there, suspended in that strange, nowhere, space.

## OLSON

The American poet, Charles Olson, wrote two seminal essays on the nature of poetry entitled, *Human Universe* (1950), and *Projective Verse* (1951). These texts sought both to overturn the prevailing ‘self-centred lyrical humanism’<sup>1</sup> and the accepted structures then prevalent in the Western tradition of lyric poetry, and to reformulate a new schematic ‘OPEN’<sup>2</sup> landscape for the poet and poetry that would revivify the relation between the human and the environment.<sup>3</sup>

Olson was attacking Western abstract rational intellect and arguing for, what we now call, a ‘wilding’<sup>4</sup> or opening of language that would return to it an immediacy of experience that reflected more accurately the fluidity of process and change.<sup>5</sup> He conceived of human creativity as *acting* empathetically within the field of a primal source or energy. The poet’s mind moving, in David Hinton’s terms, within ‘the same wild energies as the Cosmos’,<sup>6</sup> and by so doing embodying the world, its unpredictable nature, its generative and entropic forces.<sup>7</sup>

‘No separation at the skin, or at some shell separating subjective from objective realms.’<sup>8</sup>

Olson’s poems *enacted*, in terms detailed by Hinton:

‘a life of primitive immediacy, of contact, where consciousness inhabits reality in the absolute openness that is only possible when we are free of interpretive structures [...]’<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph Maud in: *Charles Olson Reader*, 2005, 39.

<sup>2</sup> Olson’s capitals. Olson also uses the phrase ‘COMPOSITION BY FIELD’. See: his essay, ‘Projective Verse’ in Olson, Charles, *A Charles Olson Reader*, Ralph Maud (ed), Manchester: Carcanet, 2005, 40.

<sup>3</sup> Olson’s friend, Robert Creeley, who was a fellow poet and member of faculty at the Black Mountain College, briefly summed up Olson’s intent in the following terms:

‘[His] intent was to break through any compartmentalization of [...] information, that is, to demonstrate, as such poems surely do, that our information is not a mere context of ‘subjects’ nor our ways of knowing only a reductive diurnal ‘rationalism’. So he will enter from a wide range of ‘grounds’, those places wherein his thought and feeling are moved to form words [...].’ (Robert Creeley: Introduction, *Olsen* 1997, xv.)

<sup>4</sup> Consider the environmental journalist and writer George Monbiot on the need for a re-wilding. The essays of the American, poet and environmentalist, Gary Snyder, too.

<sup>5</sup> Olson’s first line to the poem *Kingfishers* (1949) makes the point cogently as he writes, ‘What does not change / is the will to change’ (Olson, *Selected Poems*, 5).

<sup>6</sup> Hinton, 2017, 91.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Generation can be seen literally to be the climate of our being as decisively as the place of it is that internal environment we call our selves, the individual.’ Olson quoted in: Hinton, *The Wilds of Poetry*, 95.

<sup>8</sup> Hinton, 2017, 93.

<sup>9</sup> Hinton, 2017, 91.

The actuality of this statement may be found both in the immediacy and open flow of the ‘complexities of experience’ as they come into direct (and unmediated) *contact* with phenomena and things of the world:<sup>10</sup> that is, *to enact* rather than to infer or locate them within a detached and symbolic structure. To *enact* being the key term here. Olson asserted that, ‘a poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it ...’,<sup>11</sup> and in his, *Projective Verse*, he states:

[...] a Projective poet will [go] down through the workings of his own throat to that place where breath comes from, where breath has its beginnings, where drama has to come from, where, the coincidence is, all act springs.<sup>12</sup>

While Olson’s views were largely secular in character – looking away from Western monotheism – he did, however, hold to a core of deep metaphysical resonances.<sup>13</sup> Further, he believed that the poet must register the interconnectedness of both the head and the heart through the syllable and the line.<sup>14</sup> Olson was not alone in such assertions and some of what he says, derived from earlier American writings on the landscape and poetry of early Chinese and Japanese, Taoist and Ch’an (Zen), monks and poets. Of particular relevance were lectures by Ernest Fenollosa, published posthumously in 1919,<sup>15</sup> that argued for a poetic style, based upon the Chinese model that sought to bring the processes of thought and use of language closer to things themselves – no skin between – and ‘thereby returning us to a more primal and profound form of experience’.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Hinton, 2017, 92.

<sup>11</sup> Olson, *Reader*, 2005, 40.

<sup>12</sup> Olson, *Reader*, 2005, 49.

<sup>13</sup> Both the value, and the problem of Olson’s view, lay in his underlying attempt to ‘wild’ poetic and artistic practice and language through a form of nostalgia for early human (or societal) references. As can be seen in the following example from, *Hinge #1*, from *The Hinges of Civilization to be put back on the Door*: ‘original “town-man” put back to / Aurignacian-Magdalenian, for / evidence of a more primal & / consequent art and life than the / cultivation which followed’. Olson, Charles, *Additional Prose: A Bibliography on American, Proprioception & Other Notes & Essays*, Four Seasons Foundation, 1974, 25-26. Olson’s reference here to Aurignacian-Magdalenian relates to two cultures of the Late Paleolithic period (40,000–36,000 BCE) in Western Europe, evidence of which can be found along an arc stretching from Spain to Poland.

<sup>14</sup> As Robert Creeley explained, Olson was saying that: ‘[...] the heart is a basic instance not only of rhythm, but it is the base of the measure of rhythms for all men in the way heartbeat is like the metronome in their whole system. So that when he says the heart by way of the breath to the line, he is trying to say that it is in the line that the basic rhythmic scoring takes place. [...] The heart, then, stands, as the primary feeling term. The head, in contrast, is discriminating. It is discriminating by way of what it hears.’

(<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/charles-olson> (accessed 8/10/17).)

<sup>15</sup> Ernest Fenollosa’s lectures were edited, synthesised (part rewritten) and published by Ezra Pound as, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium of Poetry* (1919).

<sup>16</sup> Hinton, 2017, 29.

Kruszyniany, Poland-Belarus Border, 6th August 2009

The great forest – an ancient remnant of the primeval European rainforest – straddles the border territories and its dense cover lies heavily on the terrain. It grips tightly around the edges of the small, isolated villages and along the margins of the grain fields, the apple orchards and the extraordinarily fecund gardens. People hold to their enclaves, their backs turned against the border, which lies just three kilometres away, and to the forest, which surrounds all. The villagers follow the tiny dust track-roads in and out of their hamlets to reach the main arterial roads that lead to the few main towns or cities in the vicinity. All the while, however, the animals move freely, if cautiously. The migratory storks nest here – just like those we saw at a distance while travelling along the Alsace border – and like the many species of smaller birds native to the region, they hunt along the bushes, around the open pastures and fields. They fly without hindrance back and forth across the border. Small herds of Bison graze deep within the forest, as do deer. While the illusive wolves, moving in their tight family groups, and the solitary wandering lynx, stay well out of sight. In this borderland the hotel locks its doors and gates at night. The border police regularly check the guests' passports, and patrol and stop unfamiliar cars. One such event occurred earlier today and a considerable time elapsed as the driver's papers and then the contents of the car were thoroughly investigated. Tonight, a pine martin's corpse, apparently undamaged and beautiful in the light of the near full moon, lay with curious delicacy on the road, at the exact spot where the earlier search had occurred.

## LYOTARD

Cast down the walls. Breach and breathe. Inhalation. BREATH, inside and outside. This concerns the thorax. The muscular wall of the rib-cage, of the defences of the thorax, exposed to the winds. An understatement: mouth to mouth contact with distance, as though with an infinity of air....<sup>17</sup>

These words open Jean-François Lyotard's essay, *Scapeland*,<sup>18</sup> with a cathartic *event*, a breaching into the world: a metaphoric birth, a gasping for air, and the beginnings of that rhythmic exchange – of breathing and heartbeat – between the inner and outer walls of being. This breath-taking start propels the reader towards the heart of Lyotard's text as a critique of Western meta- or grand narratives that assimilate and organise knowledge in relation to a particular goal.<sup>19</sup> While discoursing upon the cultural systematisation of thought and structures of representation, much as Olson had with regard to poetry, Lyotard's focus was primarily upon the visual arts.

Like Olson, Lyotard sought to re-orientate our state of awareness and *contact* with the world of phenomena away from terms defined by convention: that is, a *land* becoming *image* and then a *landscape*. By placing the *scape* before the *land*, the view, the scene or its representation critically offers an *escape*, rather than a place or destination.<sup>20</sup> His image of the world is one constituted by flux and elusive meanings. Lyotard's *land* become *scapeland* is conditional upon the *lack* of certainty or knowable destination.<sup>21</sup>

Having established such a strong and physical relation through the *event* of the *breath*, the body and the world, Lyotard moves to the artefact: the painted landscape and its text. Both the actual experience and the painting becoming catalysts of estrangement:

They [paintings hung in museums] are exhibited in their visible presence, here and now. A cove, a mountain lake [... Each] hung short of any destination, human or divine, and left there. [...] hung in this way, their 'condition' is impalpable, unanswerable. *The grey that drifts over the sea after a storm.* It is not that you get lost in them, but that their meanings are lost.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Lyotard, *Scapeland*, 1989, 212.

<sup>18</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, 'Scapeland' in Benjamin, Andrew (ed), *The Lyotard Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1989, 212-219. (English version.)

<sup>19</sup> Jones, *Lyotard Refigured*, 2014, 138.

<sup>20</sup> For Lyotard the physical landscape, its image too, could not be a *place* if 'place [was] cognate with a [known] destination' (Lyotard, *Scapeland*, 1989, 213).

<sup>21</sup> This is mirrored in the structure of the text itself, which has neither a direct line of argument nor a formal conclusion. Despite this *Scapeland* is not a stream of consciousness: it is a highly constructed, reworked and considered text.

<sup>22</sup> Lyotard, *Scapeland*, 1989, 213. Our emphasis.

From this perspective, the sense of *estrangement* effected upon the viewer by an artwork is not going to be a comforting *event*. The land and its trace – the *landscape* – hint at things beyond the bounds of systematization or domestication: they are unruly borderlands and wildernesses beyond human signification. They become the topographic carriers of an otherness, the *figural*, and a wilding of meaning.<sup>23</sup>

If it weren't for Lyotard's opening statement of the breath and a symbiotic exchange between the interior and exterior worlds, the reader could view this condition of *estrangement* as an oppositional state to that embodied by Olson's sense both of *enactment* in, and of *contact* with, the world. But having begun his essay with the rush and exchange of breath, Lyotard closes his text in a way that cleaves away at the self as an autonomous ego.<sup>24</sup> We are stripped back and taken into a zone – a caesura, not a place – where the familiar flow of thought is disrupted, and things occur before they can be 'grasped by the understanding and forcefully slotted into the mosaic that constitutes conventional knowledge and experience.'<sup>25</sup>

This transitory moment is, for Lyotard, a critical *event* that alludes to the shadowy and elusive nearness and distance of a *figural* 'other', which acts equally within and outside of discourse and perception, visually disrupting or violating the structure of textuality.<sup>26</sup> His description of a fog of meaning that crosses the gallery walls, 'the grey that drifts over the sea [...]', approaches that of a secular apophatic language 'half seen, half touched',<sup>27</sup> that seems to echo the voices of many mystics.<sup>28</sup>

*Estrangement*, not alienation, becomes the rule of engagement, and its terms are those of an 'implosion of forms themselves' and, as Lyotard argued, 'forms are mind'.<sup>29</sup> As the

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<sup>23</sup> The visual arts, despite Edmond Burke's disinclination, in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), to consider painting as a potential point for the transmission of the sublime is, in Lyotard's terms, one of the modern sites of the sublime.

<sup>24</sup> Lyotard cleaves away, too, at what he calls, 'the discernment of the powers' and 'the defences of the mind' (Lyotard, *Scapeland*, 1989, 215).

<sup>25</sup> Jones, 2014, 120.

<sup>26</sup> Jones, 2014, 19.

<sup>27</sup> '[...] half seen, half touched, and [that] they blind and anaesthetize. A plaint of matter (of the soul), about the nets in which the mind incarcerates it.' (Lyotard, *Scapeland*, 1989, 218.)

<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that Lyotard had, as a young man, desired to be either a monk or a painter. (See the lecture 'Clouds' in: Lyotard, Jean-François, *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, 1-15.) Hence, perhaps, his last book, published posthumously, considered the Confessions of St Augustine, and in particular the role of the 'present object' [the Saint's *Confessions*] to evoke an 'absent one, in its place'. (Lyotard, Jean-François, *The Confession of Augustine*, Richard Beardworth (trans), California: Stanford University Press, 1998/2000, 7.)

<sup>29</sup> Lyotard, *Scapeland*, 1989, 217.

landscape ‘implodes’, rational orientation is questioned and the imagination<sup>30</sup> becomes the key to perception. All assumed destinations become just that, assumed and not actual, and the viewer’s encounter with the landscape (or its text) becomes one of instants:<sup>31</sup> small moments or *events* that are contrary to those validated through any meta-narrative. We stand in an uncertain hinterland<sup>32</sup> and, as Lyotard’s closing words to *Scapeland* say, we become ‘its lost traveller’.

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<sup>30</sup> Not the imagination as understood in a ‘normal sense of the word’ (Lyotard, *Scapeland*, 1989, 218), nor that outlined within Lacanian terms.

<sup>31</sup> Something that is noted by Lyotard with regard to the works of the American painter, Barnett Newman, in the terms of ‘instants’ or more cogently, applying another term central to Lyotard’s theoretic, ‘events’ which are things in a continual state of becoming. See the essay ‘Newman the Instant’ in: Lyotard, Jean-François, *The Inhuman*, Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (trans), Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991, 78-88. Barnett Newman’s paintings have ‘no message to proclaim’ for Lyotard. They ‘speak of ‘nothing and make no attempt to show us something’ (Lyotard, *Inhuman*, 82). Rather, Newman’s paintings present an instant that does not relate to anything outside – to history, etc. They are a visual event in themselves.

<sup>32</sup> Yves Bonnefoy uses the term *Arrière-pays* (a word, difficult to translate, but with a near equivalence to the English term *hinterland*) as the title for his book written in 1972, which touches directly upon the notion of both landscape and the artwork as spaces of marginal and elusive meanings. Bonnefoy, Yves, *The Arrière-pays*, Stephen Romer (trans), London: Seagull Books, 1972 (edition 2012).



Saana Fell, Kilpisjärvi, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2000

I'm sitting at the table in my chalet, by a window overlooking Kilpisjärvi. The screen to keep the mosquitoes at bay is veiling the view of the lake. The cabin is close to the water's edge, which is why there are so many insects. I've come indoors to make coffee and to escape them. They are everywhere and it's driving me slightly mad! Even the reindeer are driven crazy by them. They stand in the middle of the roads to avoid them, to the point of ignoring cars. Two days ago I crossed the lake to find where the three borders meet: a concrete block, painted yellow, that identifies where Finland, Sweden and Norway touch each other. It is surrounded by water and approached by a narrow wooden walkway raised just above the water's surface. There is nothing else there. It was somewhere and nowhere all at the same time. Returning, I sat in the boat and watched a mosquito settle on the hand of a passenger. It found the vein between the man's thumb and forefinger and stayed there for virtually the whole journey. It made me think of the time you were bitten so badly last year. Yesterday I climbed Saana Fell, where the Sámi used to pay tribute to the god of Thunder. I had to wear my mosquito net for the first part of the climb but rising above the tree line of dwarf birches, the air was fresher, and with relief I removed the net to see the landscape without the minute grid that it had imposed upon everything. I climbed up to the top of the fell; past the radio mast that silently receives sounds through the air. As I stood on the summit looking across the water to the Swedish border, I saw the sky reflected so strangely in the lake's surface that I no longer knew its limits. Water and ether merged to appear as a solid form; one world became another.

## BLANCHOT

Thomas swam out into the fog, which hid the horizon and then the shore. ‘A cloud had come down upon the sea and the surface was lost in a glow which seemed the only truly real thing’.<sup>33</sup> He swam on into this void in a state close to reverie, despite the squalling winds and the heaviness of his breath, he moved within an idealised sea that was becoming both real and threatening. Yet his body was *opening* to the sea, as if they were one, there was no reason for struggle. It had become a ‘holy place’, and the ‘presence of ALL’<sup>34</sup> that ‘no one else could penetrate’. He sensed/intuited too that his ‘imprint was there already’.<sup>35</sup> While the text returns him to the shore and to his hotel room, Thomas seems, from this point on, never to perceive the world of phenomena in a literal way. Rather it becomes a realm of alterity and the rest of his ‘endless journey’<sup>36</sup> – a continual series of *events*<sup>37</sup> – seems to unfold in a half-lit world, touched by silence and the opacity of language in relation to ‘the clarity of things’.<sup>38</sup>

This difficult dynamic between language<sup>39</sup> and clarity, or reality, was a central theme throughout Maurice Blanchot’s writings. It is evident in his first book, *Thomas the Obscure* (1941), quoted above and at the close of this final section of our paper. It is also a key theme in his essay, ‘The “Sacred” Speech of Hölderlin’ (1946), which re-evaluated the German poet’s writings through which Blanchot intuited that, ‘language arises from the silent origin of word and thing’.<sup>40</sup> Words, then, were:

[...] the presence of things before the *world* exist[ed], their perseverance after the world ha[d] disappeared, the stubbornness of what remain[ed] when everything vanish[ed] and the dumbfoundedness of what appear[ed] when nothing exists.<sup>41</sup>

There was here, perhaps, a foretelling of Derrida’s conception of the *cinder* as the most reduced state of a word, that persists after the word; there was also a growing perception

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<sup>33</sup> Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, 54.

<sup>34</sup> Blanchot, *The “Sacred” Speech of Hölderlin*, 116.

<sup>35</sup> Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, 55.

<sup>36</sup> Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, 55.

<sup>37</sup> Maurice Blanchot’s book, *Thomas the Obscure* (1941, translation 1973), is propelled more by the author’s preoccupation with an atmosphere of estrangement than it is by the author’s desire for a structured narrative trajectory.

<sup>38</sup> ‘[...] make the obscurity of language respond to the clarity of things’ Blanchot’s words from, *The Infinite Conversation*, quoted by Robert Lamberton (trans) in his endnote to, *Thomas the Obscure*, 122.

<sup>39</sup> That is, the word – its tendency to abstraction.

<sup>40</sup> Haase and Large, *Blanchot*, 60.

<sup>41</sup> Blanchot, *Work of Fire*, 328.

that the medium of the poetic word (through art too)<sup>42</sup> gave rise ‘[...] to the world [while] at the same time [making that] reality unapproachable’.<sup>43</sup> The origin of words, their silent beginning, their luminous alterity, is perhaps a gesture towards Blanchot’s friend, Levinas, and the desert god of wind and storm, Yahweh, and to the Biblical ‘still small voice’ of the wilderness.<sup>44</sup>

For Blanchot, then, it was not a matter of looking to the word, as such, but to its silence as an indicator of the world as independent from both human existence and from language.<sup>45</sup> Or, more specifically, to attain to a silence, expressed through literature, that acknowledged existence without attachment to the world. This is Levinas’, ‘*Il y a*’ (there is), expressed as a void-like fog hovering behind the physicality of all things. (Could this be what Lyotard meant by the *grey that drifts...*?) It is in this silence (not a place but a sacred mist) that Blanchot placed both his character Thomas and the works of Hölderlin: each, in their way poets, become prophets.<sup>46</sup>

Each word, then, becomes a vanishing point much like that found within the tradition of Western painting. But rather than a point that indicates a vanishing into the distance of the painting (the landscape view from which we are detached), it is a point that rebounds back to be proximate to the viewer/reader. We become our own vanishing point, the site both of our finitude and a manifestation of the sacred. To quote from the closing luminous yet apocalyptic words of *Thomas the Obscure*, we stand:

‘[...] leaning over the crypt, [...] waiting mysteriously for the tongue whose birth every prophet has felt deep in his throat to come forth from the sea and force the impossible words into their mouths.’<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> For Blanchot art, which did not allow for mastery, was the medium ‘other than knowledge [...] to breach [...] absolute estrangement’ from the other. (Haase and Large, Blanchot, 111.)

<sup>43</sup> Haase & Large, *Blanchot*, 59.

<sup>44</sup> There is a connection with the Arabic word *hawâ* for ‘blow’ and ‘wind’ and Yahweh (not an Hebrew name) may also be related to the Aramaic word, *hawâ*, which draws it into a closer proximity to the verb ‘to be’. This allows for a possible reference to the blowing of life into all things of Creation. Additionally, given that the tribes of the region were most probably of an Arabian stock the Arabic *hawâ* comes close to an interpretation of the word as a reference to the void between heaven and earth. Abraham understood that he would only find intimacy with Yahweh in the ‘...wild, in the open spaces’ of the desert. (See: Rosenberg, David, *Abraham: the First Historical Biography*, New York: Basic Books, 2006, 150.)

<sup>45</sup> Haase and Large, *Blanchot*, 60.

<sup>46</sup> Prophets or foretellers who: ‘[...] like the prophets of old – [...] were poets and artists [...] who] did not foretell the future, but made us see the present and the human condition.’ David Jasper, from an unpublished paper, DLI Gallery, Durham, 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, 116-117.

Agios Sozomenos, Cyprus, 5th August 2017

I still wanted it to be a small, picturesque, albeit ruined, Greek temple, positioned with an artist's eye – in the spirit of Claude Lorain or Nicolas Poussin – on top of a small hillock surrounded by a rugged, sun-soaked and deserted landscape. From a distance, the area is just as you described it last year: a landscape formed, in one direction, of limestone cliffs, hardy bush-scrub, occasional palms, eucalyptus trees and, in the other, a flat table-top vastness of arable land, intersected by the Buffer Zone. Standing beside the building today, the reality was both more prosaic, and more tragic. Up close, the structure, far from being well preserved, is the brutally damaged and abandoned remains of what I've discovered was once the small, inter-communal, village school. Its roof and windows are gone, the ground around it is littered with fragments of masonry, and the stucco walls pock marked with countless bullet holes. One sign of more recent activity in the abandoned village is visible, though. On the building's west wall a line of graffiti has been inscribed, but whatever it had once said has since been obliterated by a subsequent action. Each character has been blocked out with brown and green paint: purposefully if crudely erased. It is as if what once was said, needed to be forcibly forgotten: the building and the surrounding landscape rendered silent – except for the rhythmic sound of cicadas and the exhalation of my own breath.

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