



the invention of the abacus was literally the best thing I've ever seen  
in my life.

the gate to the cathedral was literally the worst thing I've ever seen  
in my life.

the blackberry bush full of small snakes was literally the worst thing I've ever seen  
in my life.

the bones of St. Foy the girl martyr were literally the best thing I've ever seen  
in my life

through simple peasant faith I was healed

through the intercession of the saints poison flowed backwards out of my fingers  
little silver daggers receded from my reedy thighs  
balls of lead coughed out of my throat      an imaginary noose evaporated  
using a simple tool I could count to 10 to the 27<sup>th</sup> power

the actual numbers resulting from measurement were literally the      things  
I've ever seen in my life

comparing with true fidelity the actual and theoretical measurements of earth and sky  
were literally my life

(I had already memorized lists of columns  
up to a ten by a ten, a ten by a hundred,  
a million by ten million)

before the invention of numbers an interval was sounded via two holes bored into the skin of a reed.

a space between two points could be described or related experientially by conveying a difference in tone or pitch. that was all in terms of distance. I went arm and arm with an undifferentiated mass. I slept in common with every thing but a small estranged music which annoyed us all in the middle of the night and tried to communicate a kind of difficult resentment between two bodies but we could not get past a failure to grasp the possibility of two bodies.

an index of all possible communications manifested in a hypertext indistinct physically but saturating the discourse like a humid fog—at vespers moving our hand up to our lip to mean ‘wine’ and a tiny modulation of our little finger adding ‘excellent wine’ but our body was wine and the fingernail in any case.

on an abacus indicated by dispersal across twenty-seven columns any number of which represented an abstract vacuum. this was initially unpleasant and confusing. a variety of tones sounded discretely and then in somewhat less grating groupings, and then seats of correct figures so that one of several delimiting edges of a body would not grind against the delimiting edges of a different body in a way opposed to the correct arrangement of seated figures. it was a rare delight to invent the seat and collapse the notion of tension and articulation into a sturdy albeit rigid container.

there was a novel distinction between fluid and the delimiting edges of a body so we all drank too much wine. in the morning discovered in startling new arrangements distributed between the twenty-seven columns of the abacus. as if half-formed concepts delimiting the still somewhat porous edges between half-formed bodies. the invention of, say, taste, or flexibility. and such that the combinations of digits, articles, bodies numbered up to ten to the 27<sup>th</sup> power and the body found attached to my body by digits wished life persisting up to the limits of that power, that is, 999,999,999,999,999,999,999,999,999,999 years

and elsewhere peripheral distinction by additional holes bored into a stiff reed cylinder, approaching urgency but listless, as in the creation of articles and forms each motion distinct in mass or pitch hardened around our delimited edges like a drastic universal event in the upper air or some separate mouth attempting to articulate the word ‘futuraity’ or ‘frog’ or ‘fog’ through a medium distinguished by distance and clarity

the first sophist at Reims who had sex with a nineteen year old  
entered through the mouth with a jaunty red cloak with holes  
for his arms and formed holes in the cheeks with fingers  
and a small silver tool with a flat head and blunt semi-circular edges.

A female or a male or digit standing slightly bow-legged in a wine-cellar reaching up to  
expose a blackened arm-pit and prominent sores on the ankles. As such, novel to discover  
a new mode of relations between speaking subjects, or rather, producing subjects,  
articulating various edges in configuration or flexible overlap between. And speaking of  
it, and occupied by the logistics of it and parsing shapes and pronunciations on the lip or  
scraping a body distinct in the commons with quick-lime to reduce striation of it, and the  
thick sap coaxed from the hiding places of wasps stirred and applied to black color to  
facilitate porousness. So that speaking of it, it clung to the record and could transit. And  
entering or exiting established a protocol between subjects—and re-asserting the gestures  
of separating or dividing off into clots—tying the laces of his or her shoes, or removing a  
clump of dry feathers from his or her throat, sweeping the clear bits of a broken wine-  
bottle into a corner or carefully shifting a figure from one column to another, making that  
figure a digit in relation to other figures in other columns.

Since the figure 'zero' had not been invented yet the sophist related his experiences to the  
marriage of Philology and Mercury, and, reflecting later,  
regretted stopping at the trivium, feeling the agility of  
assination and interpellation somewhat rigid and ossified.  
Such that extending his arm and one of his feet towards the ceiling  
it felt bitter and loathsome to find a limit of flexibility and application in the body.  
His ability to transition from one column to another, he felt,  
was bounded by the function of his muscles and the useless pliability of his skin.  
And speech terminated in several seconds of coughing and spitting  
sweet wine onto the surface of his velvet doublet. And he slept freezing in figures.

And paid for his services and sent packing with missives.  
And received at other points separated by terrain and feeling acutely  
the flexibility of one dialect pushed into the boundaries of another  
as an exercise in approaching a sensation of sweltering or  
clotting apart around the knees, elbows, and chest.

Such that the sophist lost weeks fixated on disease.  
And invested already in the model of the marriage of Philology and Mercury.

And crawling on his hands and knees along the nave of a half-built chapel  
with Cordoban key-hole doors and windows depicting the contiguous motion  
of characters through duration and action without irony or horror.  
And stopping at the altar in irony and horror and.

Such that married to such, divided, wet roof of his mouth clasped to his mouth and.

the sophist at the church of St. Foy arranged several stacks of gold coins to place at the altar and exit a lingering throat clotted with soft white feathery matter and an odor of bandages, spilled wine, old bread nesting about his collar-bone and eyelids. as against some canon he had heard about who, being beaten severely by young St. Foy in his sleep, awoke, and, bearing witness, was struck by lighting *out of fucking nowhere* and thus returned to the devil for the blasphemy of disclosure.

*whoa* said the initiates at their black wax slabs.

*whoa* said the abbot bleeding to death in his chamber.

*whoa whoa whoa* said the sophist pressing his ear against the rim of wax at the sealed door of the chamber.

such that he clipped the fingernails of the dead body to wear around his neck to save himself from lightning.

it struck the sophist as pitiful that some people had things to do on any morning other than slump over to one side to observe buff dudes from tough guilds heft blocks of dirty marble with the use of simple machines and lay them softly on the top of half-formed buildings. He saw that St. Foy's golden body was actually the body of a grown woman, with the head sawed off crudely and replaced with the head of a boy. The sophist wasn't fooled by the trick some priest had figured out of attaching earrings to the head, a little bit of chaste make-up applied to the lips and cheeks clinging somewhat like rust or distemper to the metal.

He was secretly encouraged by this hybrid-body—

he glimpsed the possibility of slipping, through dissolving his constituent pieces, from one column to the next, increasing exponentially through the removal of himself as figure and the re-mobilization of that figure elsewhere, farther along the spatial chain or grid denoting significance on a divided plane.

As with many machines, he understood little about what he was looking at.

He saw a net of lines ordering phenomenon and small horn counters shuffled neatly from the right to the left and from top to bottom, skipping columns, or being removed from the table and dropped into a velvet bag. The vision of wild growth leapt laterally in his throat, so he choked, and fled the room with the motion of two fingers touched to the back of the neck.

What was more—contained in space as discrete but infinitely reproducible.

And governed by rule-sets signaled by signs single and hard as a brown tooth.

And expelling in his panic some slight wet tendril of himself, saw the future as such—this motion of one part to another, and never the sad deflation of integration until swollen fast against the margin of the frame of the mechanism.

as an instructor of dialectics, the sophist could move fluidly from prose to verse, speak Latin into the navels of novices and second sons and girls with thinning hair and nervous tics in their fingers from a childhood encounter with demons, or Provencal or form figures picking a fluted surface downwards. If upwards, the nib would dissolve out of sense and into non-representational shapes, which, lacking internal contours, frightened him in a muddled, descending fashion, and furthermore, he had no Greek, no Arabic, could not do sums or operate an astrolabe. he could play the harp ok.

professionally, he was called upon to rehearse conflicts with snide, wealthy youths eager to brush past speech and into the observable world. the summit of dialectic demanded a precise *artlessness*, a rescinding of the concrete labor of speech into the implicit wash of syntax and grammar, quotation, undetectable flutters of the fingertip or tremors at the wrist to evoke the body of Cicero, his thin chest, his chin tilted up to the ceiling obscenely and his ass thrust out behind him.

as a by-product, the supreme height of the sophist's own artlessness manifested, socially, as something between nonchalance and a beastly anti-humanism. the abbot at Reims, he thought, was bothered by the way the sophist tore at the flesh of ducks, sucked wine off of his fingertips, paused at the knotted *omphalos* at the center of an argument to reach into his breeches and scratch a nit from his crotch. he earned his pay, he thought and he thought he went to bed well tuckered out and assiduously mindless.

he was invested in the marriage of Philology and Venus--- no, wait—he

in opening his mouth he was aware of a deep shaking at the moment that he resolved between speech or song—a disturbance in a bank of potential sound which remained absolutely impartial to meter or sense, which only barely even crooked a finger from the pit of him up to the bile at the moment of orgasm or, he reflected once, in the sound he conceived as the total sound of apprehension as a child when he heard of a boy, younger than himself, who, several villages over, had been found murdered and drained bloodless by Jews. the sophist gradually found the brief vacancies pried open in verse—the sucking in of air, the notes between phonemes which held no discernible tone or value—to be unsatisfying. he desired, without articulating that desire, a rhetoric which could assert itself in the absence of a throat or a set of lungs, as the sound of a rushing inhalation exceedingly large and encompassing whole towns and cities, the walls of buildings, the bones of saints and their boxes.

this model seemed impossible to him, and even potentially sinful—a point which a timid confessor at Reims confirmed, wiping his hands on the tight grey hairs on his neck and advising him to put it out of his mind, and to refrain from spirits, red meat and sex for seven months. the sophist rode his horse over the hills inventing small poems about youth and Italian plant-life he had never seen. he counted out the meter on his fingers, curled loosely around the reins, one and two and one and two, each digit cracked and disparate above the knuckle, contracted indefinitely to the wedges of empty space, columns, he imagined, dense with lost signals between them.

as in the resistance to an arithmetic of difference

as in the bones of the saint spiteful enough to  
set a miller's wife with rickets for ogling  
a hook-shaped earring

as in little variation between each figure  
at first glance but sequential arrangement

as in one's bed collapsed beneath his weight

as in when one digit is shifted from its place  
by a given power of ten it occupies a position  
of weightlessness as in a simple tool

as in pieces of rubble salvaged from Roman  
sites and moved overland for use in the  
construction of cathedrals and monasteries

as in, for example, white marble blocks  
reshaped to serve as an altar in Elne  
as in value becoming transitive while  
retaining its outward figure—one of  
nine configurations of strokes positioned  
in tension with one another on a fixed grid.

as in a future in which one can look at  
pictures of men and women remotely

as in a future in which one can function  
remotely and establish a mode of  
discourse across a distance

as in the line along which digits transit

as in any novice abstaining from meat,  
drink or sleep for associating, fleetingly,  
the passage of bread and wine into flesh  
with the invisible inflation of the value  
of the horn counter shifting left-wards  
along the surface of the abacus

as in the gulf between dialectic and  
arithmetic which are motion

as in the leap from rhetoric  
to harmonics to repose

as in the dream of the speech  
of birds

as in the line of birds thought  
of as a network of signification

as in any line or arrangement of  
figures taking on the function  
of a language

as in sense figures as an  
obstacle to the language of fluid  
interchange between specific bodies

as in the finger and the finger as  
units in a foreign lexicon

as in distinctions in tone and  
pitch muting and dispersing  
across space

as in space as the censor of  
absolute difference

as in the sophist fallen on the  
road, in a patch of brambles,  
taking a moment to draw breath  
before calling softly for help

as in help as a transfer of digits  
along a ragged border of one or  
several bodies

as in digits as figures defining the  
limits of a space in which speech  
moves

as in the sharp wooden frame of the  
abacus as in which are digits

which are motion, which are speech