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The Sentence as a Space for Living: Prose Architecture

Before I begin my talk, which does not speak directly to Leslie Scalapino's immeasurable contribution to the field, I want to say a few words about my first encounters with her work and what her books made possible for me as a young writer interested in narrative though not particularly in story. I have read nearly all of Leslie's work, but it was that Northpoint Press series that really changed me as a thinker—*Considering How Exaggerated Music Is*, *That They Were at the Beach*, and *Way* my absolute favorites. And, ironically, what was most transformative in my reading wasn't even a sentence but were two words followed by an em-dash. They were:

> the men—

Something stunned me out of poetry when I read this phrasing, which continues:

> —when I'd
> been out in the cold weather—were
> found lying on the street having
> died—from the weather, though
> usually being there when it's warmer (*Way*, 51)

These interruptions, making fragments out of narrative space, question the very basis of experience, of being a participant and a witness. Scalapino's em-dashes create intervals, pauses, where the reader is given room to consider how events take shape, and how time sustains and disturbs them—the telling of oneself in time, because it's never just the object being observed. There is always the presence or pressure of the one observing. I was changed by the way the speaker (and, with that, her "speaking") *bisects* the fact of

"the men" who are "found lying on the street, having/died," dividing a singular moment into a series of discrete spaces. From these intervals or fragments or utterances of event I saw how narrative was not just a story that flowed, was not just language flowing, but, at its most inventive or reflexive, was also a positioning or mapping of philosophies, a slowing down of that comprehension of one's having had an experience. For Leslie, as I understood her then, experience—that which we attempt to re-assemble in language—was not a given, was not instantly known or graspable. Rather it was a kind of exquisite problem that opened endlessly into other problems, requiring life-long study. And, it was from this point of recognition that I wandered into prose and, later, fiction.

Today I want to move along a line of thinking, one that carries through the books I've written over the last fourteen years, and arrives, somewhat threadbare, in the present, where I am trying to talk about the correlation of language to drawing, for the first time. I wrote this paper over a period of eleven months. The writing came slowly and took up the space of any other possible writing I might have wanted to do over that time. It's a kind of record, in its composition, of how the line along which we are moving, also moves. For clarity, I've divided the talk into three parts: the first focuses on origins, the second on passage, and the third on the dreams of language.

I. Origins

For all my writing life I have been fascinated with notions of origin and passage, though rarely in terms of ancestry—since I don't know where I'm from. I don't know the languages or landscapes that preceded the incursion of English and what is now the United States into my lineage. Yet, the violence of that erasure—all the inheritances interrupted—is as foundational to my relationship to language and subjectivity as is grammar. There remains some aspect of my speaking that expects a different mode of expression than English provides. I know this because of my tendency to encode as I write, also to invent languages as I've done in half of my books. I open my mouth

in my own life and I want to distort, rearrange, mispronounce the available vocabulary. This comes from a desire to resist assimilation, but equally, it arises out of a sense of exploration or adventure, a sense of puzzlement: as if something has happened to my occupation of the language, where a kind of split occurs. I move through it and see myself moving at the same time. It's a double consciousness, a questioning that simultanates my rendering of experience. (I know that's not a word—simultanates—but I needed a verb that would indicate one thing causing something else to run parallel to it). I say "I" in my language, and whatever I was setting out to describe or place in time undergoes an immediate complexity. This points to a displacement, which I believe is at the heart of any narrative I write—the displacement indicates what I call "the problem of the person," where articulating one's experiences in time—that is to say, describing the origins of one's acts, the chronology of events of a day in the life of, something which would seem to suit language very well, which would seem to be the purpose of language, is in fact one of its foremost struggles. Narrative language seems baffled by both time and memory. And yet, these are its main source materials for world-building.

So, to return to the predicament of my displaced origins, that unmappable first land and unutterable first language, rather than comb my mind for their traces I have found myself more taken by the structural and philosophical implications of their absence. How these ghosts make voids and reflective surfaces within language, the very means of one's self-determination.

In 1997 or '98, I wrote a sentence that would be the beginning of a two-decades long investigation of what comes after absence. I wrote: "About the body I know very little though I am steadily trying to improve myself, in the way animals improve themselves by licking. I have always wanted to be sharp and clean." This grouping of sentences, which opens the first story of my first book, has stayed intact in my memory, because it exemplifies perfectly my predicament as a subject in language, place, and time. The voice announces itself through a declaration of what it doesn't

know "about the body," but it turns itself toward knowing. Though, not toward a countable knowledge—something that will attenuate this lack with regard to the body—rather, toward a better disposition, in a sense a better vantage point for viewing the unknown. The voice wants a lighter constitution, to be highly functioning, "winning," so it looks out into the world for behavior to emulate: "in the way animals improve themselves by licking," and finds a gesture that encompasses both the insistence and absurdity of trying. If there is anything my narrators do it is to try. To try and try. Which results in an arrival: "I have always wanted to be sharp and clean." A statement that at once sets a standard—to be sharp and clean—but looks at that desire with nostalgia, with detachment: "I have always wanted." With these sentences I sought to establish the conditions through which I would investigate the nature of experience, which, at that time, would be understood as something originating from a feeling of being "without"—of being foreign or disoriented—but, at once, moving forward, moving through itself, because the language or the street says so. We move through language because we place it between our selves and the world, we agree on it as the means by which we represent thought and emotion. We use it as a repository for most of our facts and observations and wonderings. But, what does language have to do with the street?

For me, the two are inextricable, and the one makes the other phenomenally more interesting through this link. In 1994 I moved to San Francisco to study poetics at a college that no longer exists but which, at the time, was very centrally located. The neighborhood, where I studied and where I lived and walked my dog, provided a ground (a staging, even) that laid out not only a trajectory of arts venues, bookstores, coffee shops, taquerias, etc., but also made evident the tension and sometime collaboration between the Mexican and Central American residents of that part of the city and their mostly white, young hipster neighbors. There were demarcations of space that you processed through your urbanized body, that presented you with a set of ever evolving questions regarding your itinerary—the streets you habituated, the streets you avoided, where you felt safe, felt central,

where you sought refuge, difference, etc. By contrast, I grew up in a city where one experienced passage from one place to another by car or bus. You walked only if you were poor, and you didn't get very far before your course was interrupted by expressways. Thus, that city was always held away. It felt un-enterable and evacuated as a space of cultural exchange. Living in San Francisco, however, a place where my primary mode of passage was walking, dramatically altered what was visible and what could be experienced. To repeat, foremost, it was the fact of the body—this body turning corners, passing other bodies, being seen and read by other bodies, climbing hills, touching the sides of buildings—it was the fact of this body, following lines, making new lines, resting, moving that gave the city a sense of syntax; the day was divided into intervals, like clauses. Walking became a way of reading the city, of writing one's subjectivity and thinking into it. My walking became a story of movement, of crossing in and out of different modes of being, and fragmenting place and time. And, it did not take me long to understand this also as the very character of the sentence: movement, crossing in and out of different modes of being, fragmenting place and time.

In *Toaf*, a book I wrote to memorialize this time in my life, which I also cite as the location of another kind of crossing, the shift from being a poet to a writer of prose, I describe writing as "returning home 'half the person' and looking into the space of writing for a refill. But not just to put back what the outside had taken, also to add some new information" (14). In my thinking at the time, experience was something that you were losing as you moved through the day, as you encountered acquaintances or ran errands, something time wore out of you, and it was only through writing that you could retrieve it. But it was not so much the specifics of the day you captured—who you saw, what you did, what you thought—more the shape and energy of those encounters. I wrote so as to turn over in my mind repeatedly the irrefutable but endlessly perplexing fact that I was a person in the world, here was my body, and it was with this body (enclosed in it) that I left the house that morning and it was with the same body that I returned.

It was similar perplexities that drew me, as a college student, to philosophy over twenty years ago. I remember quite vividly my excitement whenever the professor turned our attention away from some dense text we were trying to parse to focus on a "problem" in the room. I loved the moments where we were gazing at a chair or a pencil on a desk trying to get at some essence, some clarity on what it means to know or perceive those objects. The question of how we know and how we know that we know or see or experience anything is still one of the most interesting to me—utterly unresolvable but ever present. I am interested in what one has to quiet or to suspend in the noise of one's mind to simply order a coffee in a café or to say "I am well". Ultimately, I found philosophy uninhabitable, and found poetry better suited for my particular "problems" of language, but I am indebted to the field for providing me with certain gestures and vocabulary that I've found indispensable.

While I have been trying to talk to you about "origins," in many ways I have all this time been talking about translation as well. I have a dear friend, a translator from Spanish to English, who feels very protective of this word ["translation"]; it irritates her a bit how freely I use it. Of the known languages, I am fluent in only one. So I do not translate. I don't really know what it's like. But I also know of no other word which functions so brilliantly as a metaphor for everything I've said so far. At the core of my work is the question of the original—the event before it becomes memory, trying to locate oneself in the present, in language, which is always slightly behind the present. At the core of my reading, the majority of which is work in translation (from languages all over the world) is that same question of the original. I am captivated by the beauty of the problems of translation and find that these problems transfer easily to those of experience and language—how to construct a bridge between them, how the story of our experience changes once it enters language.

When we talk about a text being translated from one language to another we often worry about the original, whether it is getting carried over, where

it exists in the new language, the new text. We can't help but wonder what it is we're reading and whether this "translation" has anything to do with that original text, the one that is out of our reach (ungraspable, because we do not have competency with it, or it's simply absent, because the original is not available in our country). Does this translation contain the traces, the friction of the writer's contact with the original language, the tension of moving through that language toward the book? Is this original energy re-written by the translator's movement between the original and target language? When I think of these questions I get so excited about where literature actually exists. Where is the poem? Is it in the mind? Is it on the page? Translation is amazing, because it presumes that there is something that needs to be carried from one place to another. But, where is that thing? And does only the translator see it? Indeed, not only does translation presume that there is something to carry, but also that it *can* be carried. Jordan Stump, a North-American translator of French, has written a provocative work on the idea of "the original" in translation. In *The Other Book*, Stump writes: "Translation forces us to admit a potentially uncomfortable truth: on some level, to some degree, [he explains] and no matter how vigorously we deny it, we do believe in the text as certain words and not others, as something inherently right in itself." What Stump is somewhat facetiously getting at is that what we appreciate and grasp from a written text has every thing to do with the precise arrangement of its words—the words chosen, the order given. He goes on to reveal the supposed discomfort: "For even as we judge a translation according to the respect it displays for a fixed set of signifiers [the original text], the translation shows us the unfixedness of those very signifiers, their fluidity, their mutability" (138). But, I am less interested in debating a translation's "faith" to an original text as I am fascinated by the problem—this discomfort—that emerges, that haunts the reading experience. How does one reconcile these corresponding texts, both of which we presuppose carry the same "something," though by means of an entirely different set of words, a different syntax, among other incompatibilities? The problem draws my attention to the passage between sites (if we understood two texts as respective sites), to what lies

in the liminal space between them, in the moment where Hungarian becomes English or Japanese becomes Turkish. And what exactly does this "becoming" entail? And, beyond these questions about the relationship of the original to the translation, is another exciting query: how we arrive at an original in the first place.

Where does the original "originate"? Although I have no idea what thoughts, impulses, memories, and other material of our interior being look like—I don't know if they take up physical space in the brain, if they exist apart from the neurons that seem to catalyze them—and I'm not sure science has gotten very far in providing an answer. But when I imagine these energies in the mind, I see them as having a very different architecture and sense of time than does the sentence. So, when we move from our minds into language, from something that must be multilayered, full of fragments, full of complete feelings, like novels that exist in the shape of an instant, what are we doing? What is the nature of that movement? How do we find language, how do we put the complex shape of our interiority—its vast web-like structure—into the straight line of the sentence? I think particularly of the English sentence, which forces one to begin with a subject, a kind of encapsulated self or other that speaks, sees, knows, or, in the case of objects, a subjectivity that presumes grasp-ability. To say, "The piano is over there," is to put across an incontrovertible statement. The speaker knows. The speaker sees. Within the statement there is little room for ambiguity, for questioning the capacity of the room, for creating duration between object and location. And, it doesn't improve the situation to adjust the sentence so that you can ask: Is the piano over there? This points us back to that "unfixedness" I mentioned earlier. How do we cultivate a language that perceives in modes other than identification and assignation? How, in prose (and I specify prose because poetry has a much easier time of dislodging objects from their categorical existences)—so, how in prose, in that gathering of sentences can we position ourselves as adventurers (not unlike translators) of space? In *Ana Patova Crosses a Bridge*, the third book in a series of novels I've written about the city-country Ravicka and its inhabitants, the Ravickians,

I come upon an architecture where the object world and language and the body and the book have become a kind of breathing, moving singularity. For the characters of this book to make sense of what's happening to them they do three things: they write, they walk, and they gather. But to write is to activate the space in which they meet, and to meet is to activate the stories of their moving through the city and their failures to move, and to move and not-move is to write. It creates a collapsed space inside which a narrative occurs. Here is a passage (or "bridge" as I like to call them) from *Ana Patova* that demonstrates a little of how I'm seeing this process.

> There was ringing in my mouth. I hummed so I could see it. Somebody was looking at me. It was Hausen. Hausen had walked by and stopped and was now staring. It was Z. and it was me and suddenly Hausen, but Hausen stood on the other side of the window, his bags in tow, his silence. Zàoter stood up and walked to the counter, leaving Hausen and me to figure out who we were to each other (there was never enough time) and who we were to this glass between us and any possible reflection. Zàoter called to me from the counter. "Two," I returned to him. He called again. "I don't know," I confessed. "Hausen?" I asked, but Hausen couldn't hear me and wouldn't step inside. "Hausen?" Zàoter called from the counter (you began to wonder if he was really there). I hummed as I waited for coffee and the man tapped the window. I looked up. It was Hausen, who was a phenomenon: you saw him; it made you think. "We're in place," I mouthed against my reflection, then leaned back to see the small cup. Two people were calling my name and leaning and scraping the floor and one of them pulled my ear and brushed her mouth against my brow and the other grabbed the shoulder of Z. and tapped it and wrote (without ink) across it, probably

> something about the man outside, then this same one turned to me. He raised his right knee, he spoke without sound, he brought his open palm to his abdomen. "Uh Huri," he said. (106)

In this particular bridge, I understand this "ringing in the mouth" as the book, the book that arises out of moments of contact between beings or objects. The book is both a duration and a response to what I see as a inverted interiority—these exchanges that are happening between Ana and Zaoter and Hausen are expressions of inner material that has somehow become exterior, that must now be incorporated as narrative. I think the glass front wall of the café, where Ana stands on one side and Hausen on the other is very important here. Not just the wall but also the distance between these three bodies; it is "distance" that creates the fragment of their speaking. Furthermore, it is within the space between these bodies, in the waiting for language to depart and arrive, that I feel I can really touch the fragility and essential confusion of (1) being in the world and (2) being in the world with others.

I have explained why this "in-between-ness" is important to me as a post-abducted subject in language (to repeat: it allows me to work on that absence or problem of origins, where the first language and first land has been erased from what is knowable), but I haven't yet said why I think it's important for fiction. However, first, I'd like to talk about why fiction itself is so central to my investigations into the nature of experience. Even as a poet, I was drawn to the inherent narrativity of language. I was entranced by how little of it one needed in order to suggest a narrative, how one need only say or write the word "chair" or "inside" before a story—multiples stories—took shape around the inscription. That gave me the sense that embedded in every word was a possible story for me but also one that existed in language. Language awakened its own self when it emitted the word "inside," so writing became something you were encoding and decoding as you moved through it. I liked to imagine how this dual action troubled the space of

fiction. It led me to think that perhaps what disorients my narrators, what creates the obstacles they endure, are, in fact, these revenants of other possible stories that hide within language. There is a trace of a bridge or a memory of a bridge without there ever having been a bridge in that story. I love the conceit of fiction: that there is a world and inside this world there is a sequence of acts with consequences. I love this because, within this system one can immediately begin to ask questions: what if the sequence is broken or reordered, what if an act makes no difference in the world, what if an act makes all the difference but the world does not respond, does not notice, what does it mean to act, does one act only with the body, is memory an act, what is an act if it is only occurring in the representational space of language, in the space of abstraction? Imagine how fiction might learn from ambiguities, silences, voids or labyrinths that lie within its own structure. How through derailments within story or at points of interruption (grammar breaking) some new or other space might open up. For me, this break would be more than a city or street suddenly appearing on the surface of an uncomprehending map, it would be experienced in the passing of language, as a revelation of syntax.

II. On Passage

In Virginia Tufte's *Artful Sentences: Syntax a Style*, she writes:

> Prose is linear. It is read and is said to move. It must by nature, therefore, generate a symbolics of spatial or temporal movement widened by its context beyond the limits of the actual sentence read from left to right in so many seconds. In whatever context, the movement may resemble accumulation or attrition, progress or other process, even stasis, or any one of these interrupted, turned, reversed. In space or time or both, it can go in any direction as continuous or repetitive, accelerated or retarded, smooth, halting, or halted. (271)

This is the most comprehensive description of what prose does that I've thus far encountered. It allows for nearly every kind of prose practice imaginable without a sense of hierarchy or judgment. The only absolute phrase is the first one—Prose is linear—which I will attempt to complicate in the last part of my talk, but for now I will allow its usefulness in describing how language moves across a page: that is to say, how the sentence is a line. Nonetheless, Tufte's definition offers "enormous variety" in how language can and does behave within the architecture of prose. Yet, as a practitioner and connoisseur of prose, something for me remains unsaid in the above. What I'm missing is perhaps unsayable. It has something to do with the title of my talk: "The Sentence as a Space for Living," something that wants to get at an emotional or bodily register in relation to prose. In this next part I will try to elucidate this feeling of *being* in the sentence. When I say, "the sentence as a space for living," what I hope to conjure is the idea of language as a three-dimensional space, traverse-able by the body; a space one enters, moves through, exits. It is not possible that I mean the physical body, because language is abstract: it does not exist properly in the world. What I mean is something like one's reading body, the one that stands before a word and gapes at it, marveling over its beauty or mystery. That body of mine that feels excitement when it encounters a semi-colon used perfectly, or when it enters a described space that hovers just above visibility. I suppose an alternative title for this paper could be "The body in prose." But, this isn't quite right either, because to say that there is a "body," however abstract we allow it to be, is to place something between the mind and language that isn't there. And, it's this absent thing that becomes as I read.

As I mentioned earlier, for the past eight or nine years, I have been interested in using "the city" as a means to make *liveable* (and live) one's passage through the sentence. But, recently, I've wanted to shed the metaphor of text as city, or at least shift it, so to establish a kind of present tense of one's time in the sentence. The sentence provides us a space for wandering. How can we talk about being inside it? What does the duration of that passage feel like? What does duration even mean in this context? And, when

I talk about how the duration of a passage *feels*, what am I getting at? To think through these questions we will examine a couple of sentences that appear formally interested in creating an experience for the reader. These are sentences that wish to trouble the duty or act of pointing, to function beyond a mere transparency (as if a window into a world). They create, in their unfolding, a sense of travel for the reader.

The first sentence, taken from Gertrude Stein's *Ida*, we read:

> There she was there was a crowd it was not very light, and she was close against so many, and then she stayed close against one or two, there might have been more room around her but she did not feel that way about it, anyway it was warm being so close to them and she did not know any of them, she did not see any of them, she looked far away, but she felt something, all right she felt something, and then the lecture or whatever it was was over. (13)

In the first independent clause, we have three complete observations: one about Ida, two about the crowd. Something that we are familiar with in Stein's work is this removal of stops, or boundaries you might say, some type of grammatical mark (a period or a comma) that would indicate the discreteness of each of these three thoughts. Rather, as a reader, we stumble on that second "there": There she was there—perhaps expecting something like "in the crowd" to follow. *There she was there in the crowd*. What we get instead is a construction that both separates and collapses the perceived subject of this sentence. Ida is not *in* the crowd. She is there and the crowd is there, with the nature of their relation unspoken, yet visually implied in this opening clause. I also appreciate the transposition of the object: it's not "there she was there the crowd was" but "there she was there was a crowd," such that "was" seems to take on the greatest weight, that act of identifying. The last phrase in that first clause "it was not very light" appears to grammatically refer back to "crowd." Though a crowd is a crowd, does one usually think of it as being "light" or "heavy?" So, perhaps, she's describing

the time of the day, adding more emotion to the obvious sense of things being too close. The comma after "light" provides a break. Then Stein sets upon the task of representing that experience of being jostled about, where the mind goes, and what the body and mind understand about where they are: she was close against so many then she was close against one or two. There might have been more room for her but at this point who knew with the whole thing feeling so immersive, with boundaries collapsed in this way. And regardless of whether there is room, Ida feels distinctly that there is not. For Stein, the moment is not done. She introduces a shift: "anyway it was warm being so close to them and she did not know any of them." The feeling of "warmth" compounds our earlier disorientation. Is being "warm" a positive or negative association? For me, a tenderness registers—"it was warm being so close to them"; it sounds cozy. But, again, that's imbalanced by "she did not know any of them." The warmth and proximity of strangers make her look "far away." Her looking away is internal; she's looking through her mind. But it's brought to the level of these bodies in space. But, as she looks away, she feels something that keeps her located. Stein says, "all right she felt something." This is an extraordinary moment. Whose voice is this? And, what exactly is "all right"? The reader undergoes a near bodily experience, navigating her way through Ida's indefinable event—"the lecture or whatever it was". Stein creates something between a third person omniscient narrator and a close third person that would give us access to Ida's thoughts; you could argue Stein's perspective is a kind of close third on the reader: as if she's saying, "go here, then here, now stop, look around, I'm not showing you anything, keep moving, do you see, now off you go to the next sentence."

I've performed a brief close reading of this sentence, but have I accomplished what I set out to do: to address the being in, the ambulating through that sentence? Is it possible to separate what a sentence does from our experience of it? In turning to the idea of the sentence as a space for living, I want to inquire, not only into to one's awareness of oneself having syntactic encounters, but also a certain resonance that exists within those encounters,

that results from passing through. A resonance that sets up a necessity of response. When I arrive here on March 6, 2014, I feel as though the thinking I've been sharing in this talk has finally caught up with the present. It is 4:37 a.m., and I register for the first time that this experience, which I've sought to capture, might not lie precisely in the language that I'm inside of, or rather, might not lie *solely* in that language but might also get completed in another text, one of my own making. Gaston Bachelard in *Poetics of Space* describes a similar moment of recognition: "We find ourselves experiencing in words, on the inside of words, secret movements of our own." It should be noted that he is referring to the words of others, the act of reading. What interests me—in the Bachelard quote—is that what he reports we find are not images or memories that belong to us or stimulate us but rather [what we find is] something that is in motion, in fact, "movements." This creates a sense of a second line forming along the course of the words I'm reading. A line that I'm writing or that is writing me. And, if we take Bachelard literally, every stop and passage through each word stirs this ancillary text. But, what is this "inner text" and how does it make itself known? Let's enter another prose architecture, one less complex in structure than Stein's:

> We have gotten into the habit of inviting other couples to our house to play cards, and once they are here they stay for a long time. (*Creature*, 55)

This sentence by Los Angeles-based prose writer Amina Cain opens a story in her recent collection *Creature*. Because of its economy, its seeming directness, because it's a sentence that summarizes patterned behavior and nothing happens in it, it's possible to miss everything it does. Nothing happens in it, mostly it just establishes the situation—friends coming over, staying a long time—it appears to just want to pass on by, deliver you to the next place, the ensuing sentence. But, something in the flatness haunts me. This sentence and many other sentences in Cain's *Creature* rouses for fiction a problem of subjectivity and motivation (getting a character across narrative space). It's a problem I like, that I could feast on. Entering through

"we"—"we have gotten"—I undergo an immediate shift of position. I become even more of a voyeur than I was: I am a witness and I am a voyeur. The first person plural pronoun offers a mysterious subjectivity: one voice, multiple presences. I read those words, "we have gotten into the habit," and I can't resist wondering about the whereabouts of the silent other. I wonder about permission to represent. Does the other half of this fictional domestic couple understand that he or she is being conjured, accounted for, in this way? Does he or she sit right next to the unfolding of this story or is the partner held by grammar in some kind of alter (that's a-l-t-e-r) space? I am interested in where the things are that are not named. I also appreciate that the "here" in "and once they are here" locates both the narrator and reader in a home: a home that is both the site of this story and this sentence. There is no direct emotion being shared here, but one can't help but wonder if "and once they are here they stay for a long time" is uttered with pride, coyness, salacity, or with nothing, just a sense that here is a fact. Restraint pulls the line taut, flattens it, but underneath something convulses. Or, to use Bachelard's relationality, though pulled tight something, inside the line moves, activates, something that is for us; that belongs to us. [Does that thing exist prior to our encounter?] Bachelard again: "A new environment allows the word to enter not only into one's thoughts but also into one's daydreams. Language dreams." Language dreams also (whereby I verb Bachelard's noun): and now we have two quotes from the same chapter "Corners" in *Poetics of Space*, one having us enter into the open of the word and the other having the word move through us. This bi-directionality, or "over-inscription" as writer and artist Danielle Vogel calls it, suggests the need (or at least the usefulness) of another possible site for exploring language. I would like to end my talk with some gestures towards and problems for that space.

Language has a dream of itself, and the book one is writing (and reading) moves through the dream. But, it does so, as Tufte tells us, linearly. What we see of language on the page is a line of marks, a series of stacked organized lines, so does that mean the dreaming happens or exists elsewhere, in

some space adjacent to writing and experience? There continues to be a suggestion that we are somehow surrounded by *other* spaces in which exciting, ungraspable things occur. It was upon finishing *Ana Patova Crosses a Bridge*, a time characterized by both celebration and grief, that I found myself in one of these spaces. In fact, all the time through *Ana Patova* I had been trying to invoke a kind of writing practice, a space of alterity that put the body in motion and activated lines. Ana tells us toward the end of the book, "There was a book I was writing that was also a series of drawings as well as a file of questions about tensile structures." This was an "over-inscription" that could not be resolved in writing.

III. The New Sentence is a Drawing (?)

To play upon a title that many of you in the audience will be familiar with, I'm calling this third part, "The New Sentence is a Drawing," but lifting my voice slightly at the end to suggest a query rather than a mandate. Or even just to marvel: how amazing would it be were the new sentence a drawing. In any case, for months, I've been struggling with how to articulate a bridge between the writing I've been doing and this drawing I've started to do, that attempts to extend that writing practice Ana talks about. They are called Prose Architectures; a kind of drawing that feels very much like writing, a way of turning the sounds and symbols for speech and thought inside out. One day in a movie I noticed a character holding a fountain pen over a large pad of paper; as soon as she began to scratch at the surface I felt something turn over in me. I had been drawing for years, aspects of buildings, habitations, but drawing was something I did when I was not writing. And though I had a collection of fountain pens, I'd never used them to draw. A fountain pen has, for me, a love of the line embedded in it. A pen with a good nib wants to just go; drawing put that "turned over thing" in my hand. To move my hand was to look at it, to pass with it. This was a way of being most present in language, because, though I was drawing, I felt immediately that writing had carried over. I knew these were prose architectures I was making, and that into the drawing space: that meant I was no longer in the

proverbial "page" into which or out of which comes language. I was now on the visual plane. Yet, it was writing that I was doing. The notion of "drawn writing" struck me as a new kind of conversation with prose. It was the writing of a text with its inner syntax somehow revealed.

Recently, when I find it difficult to explain what I'm doing and why I'm doing in clear, expository terms, I turn to a new form of expression I call a calamity (a kind of spiraling thinking essay that departs with no particular idea of where it's going). I will end my lecture with a calamity I wrote a few days ago:

> I began the day trying to write about having drawn on a morning that was held in fog; I wanted to write about the drawings I'd done and I wanted to talk about how I'd arrived there through writing: I looked at the drawings. There were hundreds of them. They were numbered, so I read their numbers out loud. I sounded their numbers in this room where I sat poised to write, because numbers, though not words, ordered things similarly, into a line. I was trying to put the drawings into a line without touching the drawings, which were now back in their box; you couldn't touch the drawings for very long, because they were fragile and liked to absorb things from the object world. My drawings liked dust and fingerprints and sugar from dates. My drawings had names like "PA 210" and "PA 04" and they lay in harmony in the archive box. But somewhere in the object world I'd decided I would talk about the drawings: I'd give them language so that I could say they weren't language exactly. They were underneath, something appearing out of something being exposed, and I wanted to say it was language with its skin peeled back, but you couldn't use peeled back language to tell an audience that the drawings were language peeled back. You had to use language with its cover and point away from language to show how language could go around exposed. Language was beautiful exposed; it was like a live wire

set loose, a hot wire, burning, leaving trace. If you looked into language this way, you saw where it burned, the map it made. The wire was a line, but because it was electrified it wouldn't lie still: it thrashed, it burned, it curled and uncurled around itself. It was a line but one that moved, sometimes forward, but mostly up then back then over itself then out then up then curling in one place until the mark grew dark then out forward and up into a rectangle then inside the rectangle and around, circling with small, tight movements. I was amazed that I was talking about wires when really I was talking about prose. I was talking about how it was to write, but doing it through drawings (that were language) and using wires to spell it out, but I was doing this on a foggy morning, where there were neither drawings nor wires. It was a table, upon which sat a computer, and I was staring at a screen imagining the drawings I had made and wanting them to teach me how to talk about the line, the line in art, which I could use to talk about the line in language, because you'd need to know that they were the same line. There was not a thing different about them. They entered blank space and made a problem for the page—what next, where to go—and they were lovely in themselves. I wanted to show the line of language I was using to write the drawings, and sometimes had buried within those drawings that line of language, but it was nothing definitive. It was usually a question, nothing I could remember right then, in that morning, where hours had gone by—one hour—and the fog had remained. With this city, you never knew whether there would be fog all day or just those first moments of the morning. I wanted to expose something about the fog, so I sat down in language, language, which has never seen fog and which was the problem I was having. I wanted to write about something that I absolutely had no understanding of. I didn't understand lines, and couldn't tell if anyone else did. I read about lines in art and couldn't understand why they wouldn't talk about language. Monika Grzymala said, "Drawing was a

process of thought conducted by the hand," and she was an artist, and though she was using language to explain her art, it was her art that most concerned her. Drawing was a process of thought—that was true and so, and especially, was writing. And we wrote through the hand, even if it were typing, we used our bodies to write. So, drawing was writing, was how I wanted the quote to go on. And to write was to think; to make lines was to draw; and lines were the foundation of writing. I made a line, and though it couldn't be read, the narrative of my line began instantly. I made a line; it couldn't be read, but I felt the story in my body. It was as experimental as everything else. I made the line while talking in my head, which was what I did while I wrote. So, I was writing, but it was drawing that had accumulated.

—adapted from the Leslie Scalapino Memorial Lecture, UC-Berkeley, 2014.