

The Remainder

Bloom's critical system of six interrelated terms is not for "interpretation." Rather it is a self-substantial, meditative/transformative means for discovering what might be called "the exception." The exception is a remainder, a kernel that, in every work of art and cultural expression, resists interpretation and thus is a token of the (Lacanian) Real.

Any method may be understood as an interpretive system, a means of translating events or ideas from a medium where they are codependent to a rational framework where they may be "parsed" and understood independently and re-contextualized through their separate contexts and other engagements.

While it is possible to regard Bloom's critical system of six terms in just this way (i.e. by studying the terms and their histories separately), the idea of a system resists dissection and argues for autonomy and self-contextualization. That is to say: once "inside" the system of reflexive/recursive terms, the dynamics of the system becomes self-sustaining.

As such, the critical system has only limited advantage as a "translator" or "decoder" of events and ideas. Its use as a means of creating "paraphrases" or "explanations" should be carefully restricted.

Rather, Bloom's critical system has a specific relationship to *other critical systems* that exhibit the same kind of autonomy — works that are consistently misunderstood as interpretive. Each of Bloom's terms (askesis, dæmon, kenosis, tessera, clinamen, apophrades) involve some version of "extimacy" (spatial-temporal dysfunctionality, typically "obversion"), where externality is regarded as an intimacy and *vice versa*, where, as in the case of Althusserian interpellation, the external is inscribed within the kernel of the individual subject.

Within the series of flips and twists, geometry gives way to topography. The logic of the Möbius band replaces any stable idea of "transitive" boundaries dividing stable spaces. The Lucretian "flow model" specifies that what appears to be solid, fixed reality is in fact in motion, held in place as an illusion by an invisible glue that, in certain exceptional conditions, can give way to "sites of exception."

Such sites are incomprehensible in terms of conventional graphics and geometries; often they are literally invisible. In contrast to the "zenithal" logic of representation as projection, they are time-dependent and obversive. The key to their structure is the nature of *remainders* that resist symbolization and projective representation. The remainder is something that can be found at all levels of cultural experiences, constructs, and products. Within the artwork, the remainder is the controversial element that always produces different responses. Within a philosophy, it is the idea that is continuously misunderstood. Within experience, it is the element that continues to generate multiple meanings (polysemy) and crises (*aporia*).

In fact, Bloom's own description of his system of six critical terms contains just such a "resistance," a remainder that Bloom himself realizes only indirectly, through his understanding of Lurianic mysticism. His system is not wholly about the "young poet's struggle to gain independence from his predecessors." It, as the title suggests, about anxiety, but in a more general sense: anxiety as the experiential dimension of the Real, which resists symbolic and imaginary representation. It is about this *resistance*.

In the concept of work (in architecture, writing, art of all kinds), there is a distinction between (1) factors supporting productive efficiency and meeting practical obligation and (2) the discontinuous project of self-awareness. The example of the individual film, for example, which meets certain expectations for artfulness and entertainment value, is not wholly explained by the consumer experience; rather, there is a *residuum* related to the thought of the director, who as "auteur" (Andrew Sarris, François Truffaut) develops, through a series of works, a "voice" that can be heard with increasing clarity by perceptive members of the audience. In fact, a new audience grows up around such voices, whose "language" resembles coded half-messages exchanged by insiders.

This is the voice that is correlated to the idea of "work," and what distinguishes work from production. The risky thesis of this project is to test the claim that all critical systems must

necessarily involve, in one form or another, Bloom's terms. The best systems will also involve the symmetries of the terms in ways that leave no doubt about the object of critique: the role of the *dæmon* in the "return of the dead" that is the (acousmatic) voice of the artist.

Agnes Vargas's film, *The Gleaners and I* (*Les glaneurs et la glaneuse*, 2000), explains the logic of this thesis. The French title in fact gives it away: the artist is a "gleaner" who appropriates the remainder, about which cultures may be aware — and in fact incorporate into highly specific legalistic frameworks — without being able to articulate critically, explain, or even paraphrase. Gleaners are those who, since ancient times (they are protected by Hebrew law described in Leviticus), are allowed access to left-overs from the first harvest. The farmer is not allowed to restrict this access. In some case there are even "gleaners of gleaners," who are allowed to gather what even this first gleaner misses.

The remainder has an ambiguous status and is defined legally as an exception, akin to the *homo sacer* of Roman Law, which specifies that an individual may be declared to exist "outside of the law" (hence, killing the *homo sacer* does not constitute murder). There are many cultural uses for these kinds of "wild cards." They resist appropriation and cannot be a part of a system of symbolic relationships. Thus, they resist also the changes that would be imposed on such consciously-constructed systems to allow them to adopt to changing times and varied circumstances. Resistance, as history shows, affords permanence; and permanence is in itself a key to universality. Nearly every culture has some customs or laws to protect the idea of exception.

The key is to realize that the idea of exception is not limited to specific practices or legal customs. It is a characteristic of space and time that, for architecture, amounts to a feature or element that works as a "bridge to the Real." In Lucretian terms, it is the function of the ϕ , the invisible dynamic "glue" that affords the illusion of stasis and solidity (*firmitas*). When this glue gives way or fails because of natural circumstances, openings to the Real are created. These openings are not disorderly; rather they are among the most universal forms in architecture and the representation of architecture in art, literature, poetry, etc. Their abundance and clarity allows systematic study; and, despite their inherently paradoxical functionalities, systematic collation of their "applications of the extimate" can lead to better critical understanding.

But, the point is not to regard critical theory as the ultimate goal of the critical system of six terms. Rather, the concept of *work as such* should develop at multiple levels and engage multiple mediums. The wager here is that Bloom's system is the most complete means of comprehending this remainder, and that other systems succeed or fail according its standard. Ironically, this thesis is not one that Bloom would share and perhaps not understand. The "truth" of his system is that it exists as "an unconscious" even in the mind and work of the "inventor." This suggests that any application of this (or any other) critical system will itself result in an "unconscious" — i.e. the production of new remainders, new resistances — about which, as Ludwig Wittgenstein might quip, "we must remain silent."