

1st floor
13, 14, 15 october 1994

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the footnote

*On first encountering the works in this show, Amanda mentioned a bed of frills. In passing. She alluded to an illusionary bed...of frills. I did not see it. It was not available to view. It existed rather in the form of pure reference. A footnote...or citation.*¹

In terms of physicality, the footnote exists as a mark of formal division, separating the two inter-dependant realms of top and bottom. On a page of text the footnote is placed underneath, in a position of marginality. As such it acts as support. Its referential function, its citing of the 'real' of the source material, serves to validate the authorial claims of the text. Thus positioned, the text's distinction is not simply an effect of its spatial positioning, but rather, is similarly manifested through a recourse to the temporal. In referring to the text's past, its heritage, the footnote renders the time of the text 'present'. Thus, in signalling a displacement of presence, the footnote functions in terms of a negative structural capacity. The text defines itself in relation to what it is not.

What is the effect of a writing about art? How does one translate between two such different languages? Must one claim priority over the other? What if the effect of such translation is not to stabilize meaning, not to 'make sense' out of some Other, but rather, to bear witness to a certain incomensurability, or interruption, of meaning?

*The task of the translator is to read the textuality of the original event **without disposing of the body**, without reducing the original event to a false transparency of sense...(original emphasis)*²

To return again to the question of physicality. The footnote appears as an occurrence of the 'real'. Not only does it exist in actuality at the bottom of the page, but in addition, it forges a connection to a world that is beyond the textuality of that page. Thus the footnote is literally and figuratively inscribed within the text. Its register of meaning is both practical and metaphoric.

*That meaning is given [donné] also means that it is given up [abandonné] to partition, to the hermeneutic law of the difference of voices...*³

Two different languages. Two differing levels of signification. Two divided coordinates of the spatial. How are we to make sense of these proliferating interstices of discordance? What if we were to note that the category of 'the bottom' is itself unsustainable. To speak of 'false bottoms' is to acknowledge that the positing of high and low, top and bottom, footer and header, is "...a historically contingent power-differential..."⁴ and thus radically unstable. While the sub-stance of the footnote is supplementary, while its font is miniaturized, its script abbreviated to various *op.cits* and *ibids*, its import relegated to the space of the margin, it remains one of the most effective legitimating gestures of academic discourse.

*The promise of a translation is that which announces to us this being-language of language: there is language, and because there is something like language, one is both able and unable to translate.*⁵

tessa dwyer

¹As my first citation in this text, the following diatribe on the relationship between dreaming, nightmare, and scale sits uncomfortably beneath the text of *the footnote*. As such it will attempt to speak above and beyond its own position of marginality. This description is inspired by, takes off from, the concept of a mythical, 'in absentia' bed of frills, standing in, or more appropriately, standing out, as suitably representative of the non-representable nature of representation itself. *On having never had a nightmare...* I've never had a nightmare. Once I had a dream with strong flashing colours in it which I called a 'nightmare', although it wasn't. I thought perhaps that might be what a nightmare might be like. At least...it sounded as if it might pass for one. Its not very hip. To have never had a nightmare. According to the *Collins Concise Dictionary of the English Language*, a nightmare can only occur during sleep whereas the action of dreaming can refer to imaginative thought while awake. But what about a nightmare that involves a certain level of consciousness? Occurring rarely, but persistently, since I was small. The significance of this 'non-dream' to the discussion in hand appears to lie in its stressing of the signifiers of texture, space and scale. Side-stepping the implications of a psychoanalytic reading, the formal properties of this dream would seem to suggest a prioritizing of touch over sight. The overwhelming presence of this 'non-dream', its ultimately threatening force, is effected, not through any reliance on the power of the image, but rather, through the visualisation of a certain non-visibility. Subjectivity is lost, subsumed, consumed by a alien agency which, as it infiltrates the space around me similarly dissimulates that very distinction between 'space' and 'me', self and non-self. The sense of alienating discomfort is effected through scale. Distorted. Exaggerated. Fluid. A process that is out of bounds, bounded and yet binding. I feel its 'coming on'. It descends upon me. 'First', in a process that is systematically non-chronological, I become miniature, minuscule. The point between two fingers, pressing lightly together. At the same time and at an utterly distinct juncture, I am those two fingers, hugely proportioned, squeezing. Grotesque. Burlesque. Enormous. Still bigger. What is it that remains so sinister about the sensation of scale, of differing gradations of the spatial?

²Shoshana Felman, "After the Apocalypse: Paul de Man and the Fall to Silence", *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M. D (New York and London, Routledge, 1992) 158.

³Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le partage des voix* (Paris, Galilée, 1982) 82. Quoted in Fritz Gutbrodt, "Poedelaire: Translation and the Volatility of the Letter", *diacritics* 22. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 1992) 59.

⁴Pheng Cheah, "Stagings of the Margin: The Limits of Critical Race Theory", *The Australian Feminist Law Journal*, Vol. 2 (March 1994) 18.

⁵Jacques Derrida, *Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, Trans. Peggy Kamuf, (New York, Schocken Books, 1985) 124.

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amanda ahmed

blood red
80cm diameter
velvet, hoola hoop

valentino
80cm diameter
velvet, hoola hoop

andrew mcqualter

tree piece
medium density fibre board, acrylic paint, gesso
set of ten
dimensions variable
\$350

ten
calico, water colour, gesso, dowel
222cm x 214cm
\$250

john meade

acrobats of love
dimensions variable
steel, feathers, lights, electric fan, plastic
\$1,200