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Two Ps in a Pod: on Time in *Finnegans Wake*

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In the library scene of *Ulysses* IX Stephen Dedalus presents us with an image of time from which time is virtually absent. “In the intense instant of imagination, when the mind, Shelley says, is a fading coal, that which I was is that which I am and that which in possibility I may come to be. So in the future, the sister of the past, I may see myself as I sit here now but by reflection from that which then I shall be.”¹ Notably the instant to which Stephen alludes captures the totality of Past-Present-Future, but only does so by subtracting from its focus time itself, which surely must have something to do with passage, with difference, and with change. Here, Past, Present and Future are in fact abstract concepts given over to space, and all that is left of the sense of time in Stephen’s words is the fate of the fading coal. The parable of the coal illustrates an essential quality of time reproduced in the *Wake*’s narrative and rhetorical strategies: time is grasped by the imagination as that which always eludes its own image. What we see when we look at this image (in place of time) is a field of objectified moments existing ideally and simultaneously. Held together by sight and preserved by reflection, Past, Present and Future can only be imagined as a cluster of fixed points abstracted from a linear continuum.

The glaring incongruity between time and the instant of its figuration is one of the *Wake*’s foremost concerns. In the course of this paper I should like to examine the rhetoric employed by Joyce as he grapples with the paradoxes that motivate this incongruity. My intention is to demonstrate that a direct correlation exists between the *Wake*’s stylistic difficulty and Joyce’s endeavour to engage more rigorously with a definition of time that takes the production of difference and the motif of passing (or fading) into account. Two passages from Bergson help give substance to this thesis and clarify its pertinence to the thinking of time in Joyce’s fiction. First, a metaphor from *Time and Free Will* (the liberty taken with the title in the English edition is, in our case, extremely

fortunate): “externality [Bergson explains,] is the distinguishing mark of things which occupy space, while states of consciousness are not essentially external to one another and become so only by being spread out in Time regarded as a homogeneous medium. [. . .] Time, conceived under the form of an unbounded and homogeneous medium, is nothing but the ghost of space, haunting the reflective consciousness.” (Bergson *Time* 99) Second, from *Creative Evolution*, is a theory formulated in the course of a reflection on the mind’s tendency to work by abstraction: “the human intellect, inasmuch as it is fashioned for the needs of human action, is an intellect which proceeds at the same time by intention and by calculation, by adapting means to ends and by thinking out mechanisms of more and more geometrical forms. Whether nature be conceived as a mechanical means regulated by mathematical laws, or as the realization of a plan, these two ways of regarding it are only the consummation of two tendencies of the mind. [. . .] In considering reality, mechanism regards only the aspect of similarity or repetition. It is therefore dominated by this law, that in nature there is only *like* reproducing *like*. The more the geometry in mechanism is emphasized, the less can mechanism admit that anything is ever created, even pure form. In so far as we are geometers, then we reject the unforeseeable.” (Bergson *Evolution* 51–52)

We know that for Bergson any equation of time with number (as in calculation and measurement) misses its object of reference altogether and amounts to a description of time as space. On the one hand Bergson’s mention of “geometry” brings into play a science of ideal objects; a mathematical discipline in which nothing new is ever created, unless it be by some error of calculation. The concept of “the unforeseeable,” on the other hand, refers to the possibility of a radical and unaccountable innovation of form. Presently this distinction will provide us with two mutually exclusive ways of perceiving (or rather, of not perceiving) time: as an ideal object measured out in space, or as an indefinite deferral of the same object out of sight or presence.

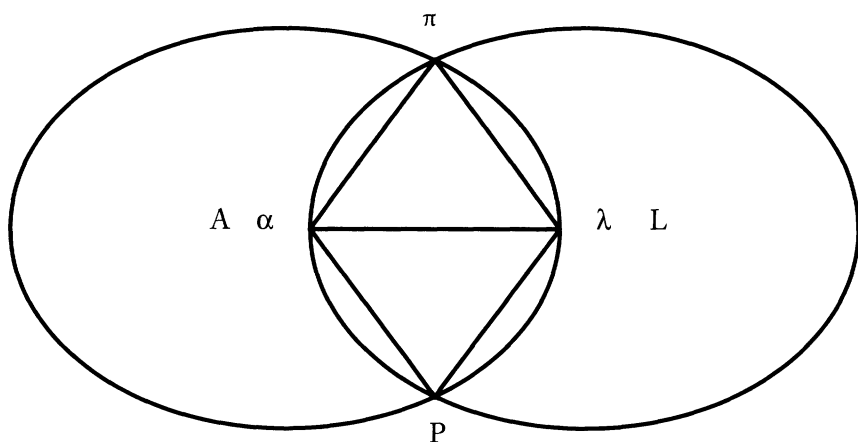
To want to preserve Geometry from the Unforeseeable is to believe in a history of ideal self-reproducing objects—a history in which time makes itself visible only under the form of a homogenous medium. In so far as geometry and the unforeseeable are held apart, set in a binary opposition, then time’s ability to create or invent² new forms is withdrawn from this history altogether. Joyce allowed the contrast between the production of geometry’s ideal truths and the event/invention of the unforeseeable to inform his allegorical characterization of space and time in the *Wake*. The novel designates time as space’s identical twin in a stereotypical, if not archetypal, sibling relationship dominated by jealousy and instincts of self-assertion. It is to be noted, here, that the story of the twins’ rivalry unfolds in a complex interplay of suggestions of “sameness” and “difference” during which both concepts have ceased to operate as mutually exclusive categories. The twins’ mutual antipathies and the expression of their

competing desires, surface, time and again, as a principle of differentiation; so that like reproduces like, sometimes unsuccessfully.

If Shem and Shaun are at once same and opposite, their polarised identity is expressed nowhere more memorably than in the course of a protracted geometry lesson during which they are confronted with two related problems: the question of their common origin, and the enigma of the figure of the opposite sex.

Now, as will pressantly be felt, there's tew tricklesome poinds where our twain of doubling bicirculars, mating approximetely in their suite poi and poi, dunloop into eath the ochre, Lucihere.! [. .] Now, to compleat anglers, beloved bironthi-arn [McHugh: brethren], and hushtokan hischtakatsch, join alfa pea and pull loose by dotties and, to be more sparematically logoical, eelpie and paleale by trunkles. [. .] Now, *aqua in buccat*. I'll make you to see figuratleavely the whome of your eternal geomater. And if you flung her headdress on her from under her highlows you'd wheeze whyse Salmonson set his seel on a hexengown.
(*Fw* 295–97)

Shem (featuring as Dolph) promises to provide his brother with a diagram representing his mother's vagina. His demonstration unfolds in a patchwork of registers and fields of reference conflating geometry, sexuality and a discourse suggestive of micturation (or, more broadly, of the production of bodily fluids). He describes two identical circles—"our twain of doubling bicirculars"—which intersect at two "tricklesome" points, to uncover an elliptical area where the circles overlap.



A cursory glance at the diagram brings to evidence two items that are of specific interest to my argument. First, we may observe the perfect symmetry of the figure plotted around the three letters which compose the mother's name. The symmetry is such that the diagram can be folded both on its vertical and on its horizontal axis without excess. The right side perfectly doubles the left; the upper part, the lower. Which leads directly to the second feature to which I would like to draw attention—the doubling of the letters P and π at the two points where the circles overlap (a detail also highlighted by the alliterative insistence on P in the brothers' analytic reconstruction of the diagram): "Now, as will pressantly be felt, there's tew tricklesome poiunds where our twain of doubling bicirculars, mating approximetely in their suite poi and poi, dunloop into eath the ochre . . . join alfa pea and pull loose by dotties and, to be more sparematically logoical, eelpie and paleale by trunksles."

We return to the question of the twins' sameness and difference by way of this insistence on P. It is not the first time in Joyce that pee is conflated with sperm, or, at the very least, charged with a strong male-sexual connotation.³ At face value, such a strategy displays an obvious unwillingness to recognize difference—to acknowledge the plain fact that P is not exactly π , (and that pee, to be sure, is not sperm). And yet this blindness to difference is precisely the stuff that the rhetoric of the *Wake* is made of: it is what we call metaphor. And what Joyce, sometimes misguidedly, calls a pun.⁴

Margaret Solomon has commented on the symmetry of the diagram, claiming that the figure represents "more than the lower extremities of a woman. If the diamond-shaped rhombus, as a whole, is 'the no niggard spot of her safety vulve' (297.26–27), it is as well, in its two parts, the double nature of the woman: mother and temptress." Solomon goes on to argue that "the diagram's double nature applies not only to the woman. [. . .] In the first place, the two circles are the twin 'pair of accomplasses' working on the problem." (Solomon 106) She concludes that "the 'mating' of the circle suggests at least temporary unification of the twins—in male-to-male sexual activity but also in a coming-together as one figure." (107) My interest in the diagram, indeed in the rhetoric of the entire episode, lies less in an interpretation of the specific sexual significance of the image itself than in an understanding of the relation between time and the notion of figure. It is a two way relation that concerns both the manner in which processes of figuration and self-figuration are constituted in time and the way in which the mind reproduces an idea of time by focusing, figuratively, on one or other of time's distinctive qualities. I subscribe to Solomon's opinion that the diagram is as much about the mother as it is about the identity and difference of the twins (two peas, as it were, in a pod). It is also, and most importantly, about imagining the genealogy of time and space: about a metaphysical automatism or a habit of thought that would have us trace the image of the one back to the eternal science of the other.

Dolph's investigation of eternal "geomatry" brings to light the image of a space that stands for our eternal mother earth; and of a temporal flow that covers the history of "all meinkind" (*Fw* 297) from birth to burial in a primordial and "constant [. . .] fluxion" (*Fw* 297). The image is not merely abstract and un-individuated, but also illustrative of an "Ideal Eternal" present; which is to say, of the temporal dimension in which the history of ideal eternal spaces (to wit, the history of geometry) takes place. Such an expression—the history of ideal eternal spaces begs the question of what happens to eternal forms when they are historicized: why, indeed, would any eternal object need a history? And how could a history of our eternal mother earth—the very ground from which any history is thought—be shown to unfold in time? In as much as the history of geometry is originary of the principles of repetition and differentiation it is also constitutive of identity, of sameness and of an Idea of time captured and immortalized in the instant of imagination.

As the twins work out their geometry problem step by step, a peculiar quality of time becomes apparent. (The *Wake*'s insistent allusions to genetic and mechanical reproduction are to be construed in the light of such a quality which has to do with the presentation and the preservation of geometry's eternal truths; that is to say, with the ironies involved in the need to make present that which is eternal: "Now as will pressantly be felt. . . . Now to compleat anglers. . . . Now, aqua in buccat. I will . . ."). The Geometry lesson foregrounds an internal split in the structure of the now, a "double nature" characteristic of the real-live "pressant" in which the exercise is conducted. An image of the future is inscribed, a priori, in this "pressant." The future is seen as a constituent part of the "now" propelling the "now" beyond its limit.

The interplay between the eternal existence of ideal forms and their actualization in the geometer's reiterated "now" is exemplary of a vaster temporal design in which the narrative of the *Wake* may be seen to unfold. At several junctures throughout the novel, history is characterized in terms of a constant process of self-reproduction whereby the ideal present produces images of itself and projects them onto the future. An ideal eternal movement of time engenders and accumulates these images, maintaining them in their virtual state, until the events of real history reduce one of them to actuality; and in the real instant of imagination the real present recognizes itself as past: "there is a future in every past that is present . . ." (*Fw* 496). Imagination holds past, present and future in a continuous and contemporaneous grasp. And, concurrently, the events of history register a conversion from the actual present to the actual past by way of a "PROBAPossible" future (*Fw* 262). Presence is thus given to ideal eternal history in "fickers [figures] which are returnally reproductive of themselves" (*Fw* 298). If a science of eternal mother earth—*gaia mater*—is the origin of all abstract thought, including the thought of that "constant [. . .] fluxion" (*Fw* 297) we associate with time, it is on account of this "returnally reproductive" movement that is proper to the figure of the circle.

The idea of returnally self-reproductive figuration extends easily to the very early image of time presented in the *Wake*—an image that famously situates the *Wake's medias res* in the present tense of a “riverrun past”; and that announces the novel’s grand-narrative design as the completion of an ideal historical re-course. Much has been written about the novel’s opening gesture and the significance of the first paragraph for Joyce’s investment in circular or re-circular structures.⁵ Clive Hart’s observation that “Joyce decided quite early that *Finnegans Wake* was to be cyclic as a whole—the last sentence running into the first” (Hart 46) expresses a critical commonplace that has long been canonized by hearsay. Appropriately enough, the view that the *Wake's* first sentence joins with the very last to complete a full circle seems to have been always in circulation, and though it has been challenged on occasion it continues to be approached as standard opinion.⁶ I do not wish to question this opinion, here. Nor even to rehearse it. My intention, in bringing up this point, is to take note of the correspondences that obtain between the idea of “fickers which are returnally reproductive of themselves” and the image of time produced in the *Wake's* incipit. From its opening word the *Wake* would have us construe Time’s unity—which is to say, Time’s continued existence in the present—in terms of a mechanics of eternal self-reproduction. As in the case of Stephen’s “instant of imagination,” the riverrun covers an inter-subjective history that holds Past, Present and Future within the reach of a homogeneous and homogenizing self-presence. Once again there would seem to be no trace of change or of self-differentiation in this history. The mind generates an image of inter-subjective movement in which time flows, runs and “recirculates” but doesn’t quite pass. “Which is unpassible” (*Fw* 298).

A time that flows without passing flows, to be sure, but absurdly. And the absurd (“unpassible”) thought of a narrative, or of a history, unfolding in an eternally self-replicating time-frame features ever so prominently in the *Wake's* discourses on time. We say of time that it flows, and also that it passes. Yet passing is precisely the predicate of time with which the imagination (and indeed the entire business of reproducing ideal geometric figures) is unable to cope. There is in fact a slight but extremely consequential difference between flowing and passing to which we are alerted by the *Wake's* strategic conflation of fluvial imagery with the rhetoric of passing water. Passing is first and foremost a movement that traces change: it qualifies the changes wrought by time as essentially eschatological.

As a correlate of change passage is also essential to the production of the future and to the advancement of history future-ward. Before proceeding to a more detailed examination of this claim it will be useful to make a distinction between two orders of the future emerging in our readings so far. In the first place, we may understand the future as a projected term of the present: a foreseen or prefigured consequence of history, subordinated to its constant linear expansion. Alternatively, we may consider the future as a multiplicity of virtual

states coexisting in the instant of imagination: a series of virtual self-images by means of which the “pressant” endlessly re-negotiates its end and renews its lease of life. In the former case we view the flow of time as a homogeneous movement that is synchronised with the “now” of an ideal self-presence.⁷ The present has already caught up with the future; it holds it in its grasp effacing its potential for change. Such a future *is* actual (it *is* produced) only in so far as it is overtaken by the now: but to the extent that it has come to pass it is really not futural at all. By contrast, the future as “virtuality” yields its image to the present as an infinity of projected “probapossibilities.” While it is also generated by the present, it can be said to obey a different logic of production and circulation. Which is to say that it belongs to a different economy.

In the opening section of *Time and Free Will*, Bergson promotes a similar distinction when he observes that “the future, which we dispose of to our liking, appears to us at the same time under a multitude of forms, equally attractive and equally possible. Even if the most coveted of these becomes realized, it will be necessary to give up the others, and we shall have lost a great deal. The idea of the future, pregnant with an infinity of possibilities, is thus more fruitful than the future itself, and this is why we find more charm in hope than in possession. . . .” (Bergson *Time* 9–10) The distinction between two orders of the future, the one constituted by hope, the other by possession, discriminates between two ways of extending (and re-negotiating) the boundaries of self-presence. It is significant that Bergson should formulate this comparison by way of a discourse concerned with production figures and reproductive efficiency. Bergson observes that as long as the future remains “unrealized” (that is to say, until it continues to be shaped by desire) time will be seen to produce an infinity of virtual images “appear[ing] to us . . . under a multitude of forms, equally attractive and equally possible.” It is important to note, here, that in so far as the future “appears to us” it is always understood as a modification of the present. In this specific sense, there can be little difference between the appearance of a series of possible futures in the imagination and the actual occurrence of one of these futures in history. So long as the future is foreseeable it can always be reduced to a variable of the now: it has already been figured. The advantage of keeping the real future at bay (by deferring its possession) amounts to not having to choose between one or other possibility of actualization, thereby giving up “a great deal.” It is not, therefore, that the future we hope for does not exist. But rather, that the multitude of forms under which it comes to be held in consciousness is numerically indefinite or at the very least unquantifiable: it exists at any given time umpteen times over and remains irreducible to an “either-or” logic of selection and forfeiture. This is an economy in which nothing is given up and nothing is lost: in which even the intense instant of imagination, the “now” (or rather, the “I-now” intended as the minimal unit of ideal history), is conceived as a multiplicity pressured future-ward by the projects of hope and desire.

As an object of desire the future affects the present confronting the flow of time with an impulse for change. But change is only possible if there is passing—in other words, if something of the identity of the present is given up or lost. Loss of identity is of the essence if we are to make anything of time's operations beyond what we see in an abstract representation of successive moments arranged side by side. The future is a sister of the past in this sense: that it confronts the present with the imperative of passing. We might conclude, then, that the value of the past in the *Wake's* inter-subjective economies—what we might term its currency, as it were—is, precisely, that of making the now perishable.

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Like the geometry lesson of chapter X the parable of “the Mookse and the Gripes” employs the pretext of a scientific discussion to engage with modern theories of time and space. The focus of the episode is once again on the bickering of the identical twins, and their endeavours to assert their individuality. Professor Jones, renowned “spatialist” (*Fw* 149), is busy expounding an abstruse philosophical concept involving from the outset a critique of “the sophology of Bitchson” followed by a scathing reference to the “theorics of Winestain” (*Fw* 149). The lecture produces an absurd hybrid of expressions that mimics Wyndham Lewis's indiscriminating attack on modernist time-philosophy, and repeats, in a plethora of self-contradiction, his unwillingness to distinguish Einstein from Bergson.⁸ Jones is eager to discredit both the alleged multiplicity of internal conscious states (which comprise the identity of the subject in time), and the four-dimensional unity of space-time (which only serves, in Lewis's view, to subordinate the traditional three-dimensions to the fourth).⁹ His apparent intention is to dissociate time from space by means of a dissection of the concepts of *talis* and *qualis*, for which purpose he has promised to deliver an ad hoc quantum theory.

To put it all the more plumbisily. The speechform is a mere surrogate. Whilst the quality and tality (I shall explex what you ought to mean by this with its proper when and where and why and how in the subsequent sentence) are alternatively harrogate and arrogate, as the gates may be.

Talis is a word often abused by many passims (I am working out a quantum theory about it for it is really a most tantumising state of affairs).

(*Fw* 149)

The theory develops into an incoherent harangue principally concerned with an aggressive promotion of the speaker's perspective. Jones first tries to intimidate his audience with a string of pseudo-technical terms borrowed from his antagonist and alter ego Loewy-Brueller [Lewis/Lévy-Bruehl]. The space/time dichotomy is subtly worked into this speech, with references to geometry and television (far-sight) balancing an allusion to the activity of Providence (foresight) in the Ideal Eternal descent of man: “the inception and descent and

endswell of Man is *temporarily* wrapped in obscenity, looking through at these accidents with the faroscope of television, (this nightlife instrument needs still some subtractional betterment in the readjustment of the more refrangible angles to the squeals of his hypothesis on the outer tin sides) I can easily believe heartily in my own most spacious immensity . . ." (*Fw* 150). Having argued his worth and taken his rivals to task the Professor decides to tone down the rhetoric: "As my explanations here are probably above your understandings, lattlebrattons [. . .] I shall revert to a more expletive method which I frequently use when I have to sermo wit muddlecrass pupils" (*Fw* 152). The fable of "the Mookse and the Gripes" is thus presented as an illustration of a scientific thesis for the benefit of the non-specialized reader. The thesis takes the twin concepts of "tality" and "quality," paralleled by the pairing of "tantum" and "quantum," as its main mathematical-philosophical referent—both sets of terms focusing our attention on the categories of genus and number and on the production of like by like ("*tale e quale*" in Italian means one and the same whereas "*tanto quanto*" indicates an exact balance between two equal amounts).

On more than one occasion Chapter VI suggests that the twins are in fact identical, that they form a single unit, divided yet inseparable. This notion is conveyed most notably in the closing words of the chapter, "*Semus sumus*" (*Fw* 168), but also in the play on the word *mukke* which is Danish for "to gripe." (Tindall 121) The parable of "the Mookse and the Gripes" assigns to each of the twins contrasting character traits so that it should always be possible to tell them apart. The Gripes (a Shem-type) is associated with good hearing, with a preference for time over space and with a mobility suggestive of religious and political restlessness: "he was much too schystimatically auricular" (*Fw* 157). The Mookse on the other hand is singled out by the motifs of sight, by a thirst for his rival's blood, and by an identification with centralized Papal-Imperial authority: "he was fore too adiaptotously [McHugh: infallibly] farseeing" (*Fw* 157). The Shem/Shawn opposition repeats itself consistently throughout the novel, yet the defining character traits are taken to such levels of abstraction that the differences are sometimes ironed out and the very mechanisms of bisection or duplication which establish the twins' individuality give way to fusion (and confusion). In the abstractions yielded by the *Wake's* pseudo-scientific discourses Shem and Shawn become as interchangeable as the two points "P" and " π " at which "our twain of doubling bicirculars" intersect.

Bisection and duplication ensure that sameness and difference are produced according to a principle of good measure. The outline separating same and other is blurred, yet the mathematical equation that organizes the interchange of both terms, effectively balancing them out, remains fundamentally unchallenged. In their last appearance, as Muta and Juva, the twins themselves make this point very clearly.

Muta: So that when we shall have acquired unification we shall pass on to diversity and when we shall have passed on to diversity we shall have acquired the instinct to combat and when we shall have acquired the instinct to combat we shall pass back to the spirit of appeasement?

Juva: By the light of the bright reason which daysends to us from the high.
(*Fw* 610)

Such a narrative pattern may be seen to express the unvarying nature of the *Wake's* universe, describing an ultimately stable foundation on which all of Joyce's semiotic extravagances are grounded. The text's volatility would appear to be, here, but a surface effect, an impression of anarchy regulated by an underlying solidity of structure. This is a view held by several readers of Joyce's last novel. Terry Eagleton, for one, has observed that "[t]he *Wake's* anarchic differencing is possible only on the basis of a secret homogenizing of reality, a prior equalizing of all items that then enables them to enter into the most shocking idiosyncratic permutations. There comes a point, as Hegel was well aware, at which 'pure' difference merely collapses back into 'pure' identity, united as they are in their utter indeterminacy." (Eagleton 36) Robert Klawitter seems to share Eagleton's assumptions when he speaks of the *Wake* as "a formal, mechanical, determinate, uncreative world" (Klawitter 433) that corresponds to "a parodic representation of unreality as Bergson describes it." (435) For these and other critics, the *Wake* is at heart ("secretly") an affirmation of the common nature of all things in the world: it posits reality as a solid and unchanging structure onto which change and diversity are layered.

In the following paragraphs I should like to focus on a significantly different view of the notion of difference than the one expressed by Eagleton (via Hegel) or by Klawitter (via Bergson). I believe such a view will account more fully for the extravagance of the *Wake's* treatment of time and for its fluid representation of reality. Time in the *Wake* is stranger, more inexplicably unique than the periodic fusions and fissions of Shem and Shaun might suggest. It is true that Joyce insists on the reversibility of the changes wrought by time, subordinating the antagonism of Shem and Shaun to the overriding fact of a common genetic identity. As the history of the twins' rivalry progresses it produces diversity from sameness, and sameness from diversity without altering the nature of the one or the other. This plot is viewed "[b]y the light of the bright reason which daysends to us from the high" as a self-fulfilling and self-perpetuating exchange. Time in the *Wake* is indeed reversible; the twins are genetically and conceptually identical; and their constant bickering—their "coming together as one figure" and coming apart in two halves—provides a dramatic representation of the interplay of coinciding contraries. Such a representation, however, fails to take into account the *Wake's* rhetorical and syntactic idiosyncracies. Specifically, the fact that the performance of the *Wake's*

narrative must be approached by way of a particularly intractable grammar: a grammar of the night the interpretation of which invites a rigorous rethinking of the concept of difference and the movement of self-differentiation. As we grapple with the difficulties of this grammar two orders of difference must be discerned. The first is a difference between self and other: a difference we might term conceptual or categorical, since it distinguishes self and other *a priori* and classifies them as two units on the opposite side of a mathematical relation. This type of difference is the negative counterpart of sameness in a syllogistic progression. It contradicts sameness conceptually but it leaves the concept of sameness intact. It must not be confused with a difference that we perceive between self and self-same: a difference that cannot be objectively determined and that acts upon the integrity of the conceptual/mathematical unit, so that any given quantity turns out in fact to be unequal to itself.

Although Joyce does exploit the theme of doubles and coinciding contraries to an extreme degree—though he insists on “the mating of opposites” and the splitting of the same to balance difference and self-identity—it will be established that the burden of producing self-difference in the *Wake* is not on a mathematical procedure of bisection and duplication but on a rhetoric of excess that invalidates all good measure. This type of rhetoric features most prominently in association with the character of Shem, plagiarist and epical forger whose attempt at self-portraiture results in the creation of a monstrous double reminiscent of Dorian Gray’s:

[he] wrote over every square inch of the only foolscap available, his own body, till by its corrosive sublimation one continuous present tense integument slowly unfolded all marryvoising moodmoulded cyclewheeling history (thereby, he said, reflecting from his own individual person life unlivable, transaccidentated through the slow fires of consciousness into a dividual chaos . . .) but with each word that would not pass away the squidself which he had squirtscreened from the crystalline world waned chagreenold and doriangrayer in its dudhud.
(*Fw* 185–86)

In the *Wake*, the paradox of an identity that differs from itself stands unresolved and un-synthesized not because the *Wake* has exempted itself from the obligations of a coherent thesis, but because the idea of time with which it engages exceeds figural or thetic representation. Taken as a pair, Shem and Shaun are a genetic unit, but taken individually they are unequal to themselves. Their unity is wrought in a movement of self-differentiation which cannot be accounted for either geometrically or chronographically.

In chapter 2 of *Time and Free Will* Bergson observes that throughout the history of metaphysics failure to distinguish correctly between two types of multiplicity affected the meaning of the word ‘time’ as it occurred in common usage giving rise to no end of philosophical inconsistency. Different meanings

of the word “time” (time as the production of pure heterogeneity and time perceived under the form of a homogeneous medium) correspond to different ways of organizing the relation between things that change in essence and things that preserve their identity. Bergson explains:

we must admit two kinds of multiplicity, two possible senses of the word “distinguish,” two conceptions, the one qualitative and the other quantitative, of the difference between the *same* and the *other*. Sometimes this multiplicity, this distinctness, this heterogeneity, contains number only potentially, as Aristotle would have said. Consciousness, then, makes a qualitative discrimination without any further thought of counting the qualities or even of distinguishing them as *several*. In such a case we have a multiplicity without quantity. (Bergson *Time* 121–122)

The reason pure time (duration) cannot be counted or measured is that it unfolds in a complex unity of multiple states of consciousness which change in essence as they unfold. These states cannot be numbered because they are part of a continuous process of self-differentiation; and if the parts change with every temporal transaction there is no way of adding them up to a whole. As (a) multiplicity that “contains number only potentially” this whole—this continuous process—is undecidably singular and unquantifiable. The illusion of measuring or counting time derives from a second type of multiplicity, which arranges abstract units side by side, and enables us to reckon with reality in numbers. We count time as a succession of moments, a dotted line in which one “now” follows another. This is “time” only in the conventionally correct (but philosophically deceptive) sense of the word:

it is a question of a multiplicity of terms which are counted or which are conceived as being capable of being counted; but we think then of the possibility of externalizing them in relation to one another, we set them out in space. Unfortunately, we are so accustomed to illustrate one of these two meanings of the same word by the other, and even to perceive the one in the other, that we find it extraordinarily difficult to distinguish between them or at least to express this distinction in words. (122)

Clearly, it is not just a matter of being aware of the confusion in order to avoid it. Bergson warns us that the extension of the category of pure time into space is an inescapable product of conceptual thought, determined by habit and modes of expression, but also by the very manner in which human intelligence operates, creating meaning (fashioning the intelligible world) in a process of abstraction.

Abstraction entails a reduction of the temporal flux to the order of sameness and repetition: “what is repeated is some aspect that our senses, and especially our intellect, have singled out from reality, just because our action,

upon which all the effort of our intellect is directed, can move only among repetitions. Thus, concentrated on that which repeats, solely preoccupied in welding the same to the same, intellect turns away from the vision of time." (Bergson *Evolution* 52) As an abstract image time can only be conceived (and conceptualized) in terms of quantitative rather than qualitative differentiations. This means that in the conceptual world time divides only to reproduce itself as the same. The image of the present extends into the future with no loss of identity, no essential or typological differentiation involved. This is what Bergson means when he claims that "of the future only that is foreseen which is like the past or can be made up again with elements like those of the past." (Bergson *Time* 33) Immobilised and subjected to the purpose of a homogeneous view of reality, time is deprived of any potential for novelty or change. The blindness of foresight is, in this sense, identical to the blindness of geometry in that it loses sight of time in the act of objectifying it.

Bergson examines the work of human intelligence and discovers a natural attraction of the intellect to the discontinuous, to the immobile, to the inorganic.¹⁰ These observations lead to the conclusion that "*Of the discontinuous alone does the intellect form a clear idea*"—a statement echoed scarcely a page later by the following: "*Of immobility alone does the intellect form a clear idea.*" (Bergson *Evolution* 171) We learn that the intellect's principal tool for making sense of reality is to break it down into component parts and to rearrange these parts into pre-determined, universally meaningful structures. There is a sense, in Bergson's words, in which "a clear idea" of reality entails a suppression of everything that is vital and organic. Like a still life or a dissection it may have great truth value but is essentially lifeless: "we may expect to find that whatever is fluid in the real will escape [the intellect] in part, and whatever is life in the living will escape it altogether." (169)

The world of concepts becomes intelligible (and is therefore apprehended by the intellect) because it resembles the world of stable and solid objects: "Concepts [. . .] are outside each other like objects in space; and they have the same stability as such objects, on which they have been modeled." (177) In so far as it is an instrument of objective knowledge and intellectual understanding, in as much as it relies on abstraction and the setting up of recognisable (repeatable) signs, conceptual language remains a derivative of logic and geometry: that is to say, it provides an appropriate medium for the description of reality in terms of its constituent parts, dissected, immobilised, and laid out in space.

The bottom line, here, is that the world created by conceptual thought and geometric construction may indeed be eternal and all encompassing; but it is also incomplete. Something escapes this world that is variously defined as "fluid," "mobile," "continuous," and productive of "change." As we have seen, Bergsonian rhetoric would encourage us to identify this "something" with a life-force that animates being—a spirit of creation breathing through

life: in Joyce it is an unholy ghost that inspires the writer's mock-Eucharistic transubstantiations; or, more pertinently in a reading of the geometry lesson of *Finnegans Wake*, the passing of water as a metaphor for the continuous self-consuming movement of time which escapes geometry's returnally self-reproductive figurations.

This movement dictates its own mode of presentation in excess of the present and motivates Joyce's repeated references to an artistic practice set to obliterate the objects of its own creation. The ageing self-portrait of Shem (*Fw* 185–86) produced out of the artist's bodily excretions is a case in point; but several other examples come to mind. The forged and unsigned letter examined in the course of HCE's trial—a document that in many ways stands for the *Wake* itself—is compared to the “partly obliterated . . . negative” of a badly developed photo, yielding “a positively grotesquely distorted macromass” (*Fw* 111) of illegible features. To the same effect, one might also mention Joyce's invention of the “fadograph” (*Fw* 6) which records scenes from the past in a kind of negative image, as if placing photographic memory under erasure. All of these instances affirm a clear-cut epistemological distinction between the discourses of art and science—a distinction whereby the transient reality experienced and represented by the artist is viewed in diametrical opposition to the stable and solid world generated by the geometer. The artist conceives of an image that erases itself as it comes into focus: weaving is paired with unweaving, composition with decomposition, writing with unwriting, in a pattern that follows the ebb and flow of time and invites a radical rethinking of the processes of figuration and self-figuration: “As we, or mother Dana, weave and unweave our bodies, Stephen said, from day to day, their molecules shuttled to and fro, so does the artist weave and unweave his image” (*U* 249).

Weaving and unweaving, or writing and unwriting, do not merely stand for two antithetical passages in Joyce's creative process. I have just referred to a compositional pattern that simulates the ebb and flow of time, but it is perhaps more accurate to speak of two simultaneous currents running counter to each other; or of a single temporal flux that accommodates two contradictory drives. Consider, once again, Dolph's illustration of the “geomatric” figure in chapter X:

Now, *aqua in buccat*. I'll make you to see figuratleavely the whome of your eternal geometer. And if you flung her headdress on her from under her highlows you'd wheeze whyse Salmonson set his seel on a hexengown.
(*Fw* 296–97)

The reference to “salmonson” picks up a recurrent motif in the novel wherein the figure of the salmon is repeatedly associated with the sexual identity of the father. In the case of Dolph's geometry exercise this analogy is reinforced by the phonetic proximity of “salmon” and “semen,” to suggest the

following narrative concept: like semen, salmon travels upstream to reproduce but also to meet its end. Its instinct finds no contradiction in a venture that spells death and life, suicide and self-preservation at one and the same time. In order to understand the significance of this paradox for an account of the *Wake's* temporal structure we shall have to imagine time's dual activity in terms of a multiple yet undivided flow that comprehends both passing and advancing.¹¹ It will be necessary to think of past, present and future not as distinct points within a linear sequence but as states of being or becoming in which the history of the Self unfolds—passing away and pressing forward are here parallel functions of time that give time its direction, and regulate the production of self-sameness and self-difference.

Gilles Deleuze provides the following pertinent description of the dual nature of time, and of the manner in which it is brought to relief in the modern Cinematic image:

since the past is constituted not after the present that it was but at the same time, time has to split in two at each moment as present and past, which differ from each other in nature, or, what amounts to the same thing, it has to split the present in two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past. Time has to split at the same time as it sets itself out or unrolls itself: it splits in two dissymmetrical jets, one of which makes all the present pass on, while the other preserves all the past. (*Cinema* 81)

Deleuze's interpretation of this complex dynamic is based on a reading of Bergson's notion of multiplicity, and seeks to open philosophy to the thought of a "whole" and "integral" order of time in which the past exists preserved within itself and ontologically independent of the present. The idea that past and present co-exist means that their inter-relation cannot be grasped either numerically or psychologically. We are not to think of the past as an earlier point in time (yesterday, one hour ago) nor of memory as a degraded presentation of the present (a sort of perception at one remove). For Deleuze the image of the past is to the image of the present as the virtual image is to its actual correlate; and their correct distinction depends on a movement of essential (genetic) differentiation. In other words the self-identical past is a past that has no foundation in any subjective act of memorisation. It belongs to no single or specific human present:

We are too accustomed to thinking in terms of the "present." We believe that a present is only past when it is replaced by another present. Nevertheless, let us stop and reflect for a moment: How would a new present come about if the old present did not pass at the same time that it *is* present? How would any present whatsoever pass, if it were not past *at the same time as present*? The past could never be constituted if it had not been constituted first of all, at the same time that it was present. (*Bergsonism* 58)

We learn, here, that passing is not an event that befalls the now *after* it has come into being. That would make passing a mere subsequence of being. Nor is it a case of the simultaneity of two individual instants juggled together in consciousness, but rather of a double temporal index that constitutes the nature of time as simultaneously passive and active: "Useless and inactive, impassive, [the past] IS, in the full sense of the word: It is identical with being in itself. It should not be said that it 'was,' since it is the in-itself of being, and the form under which being is preserved in itself (in opposition to the present, the form under which being is consummated and places itself outside of itself)." (55) When we say that the past "is," while the present "passes" in a continuity of change, we employ the notion of passing as a synonym of fading and of becoming. Such a confluence of terms alerts us, once again, to a structural ambivalence at play in the notion of passage: an ambivalence in which we recognize time's most characteristic operation. To pass is to become past (to become extinct): yet a passage is also a crossing over or a stepping past. Time "brings us . . . back" (*Fw* 3), and obliterates "us." We rearrive in the present yet past the limit of the present, beyond the mark of the moment's finitude.

This exceeding of the limit (be it semantic, syntactic, eschatological or whatnot) is perhaps the most characteristic stylistic feature of the *Wake*. Amongst other things it constitutes an economic principle. It determines the novel's inter-subjective transactions, organizes the production of selfhood and otherness, and complicates our conception of the "now" as chronological unit. We have discerned in the *Wake*'s parodies of geometry a concern with the genesis of time; that is to say, with a reconstruction of the unitary instant that inaugurates the history of sameness and difference. What comes undone in Joyce's writing, when the unit of measure exceeds itself, is precisely the integrity of such an instant—the solidity of the ground from which narratives ordinarily negotiate change and bring all modifications of the Self into view (so that "in the future, the sister of the past, I may see myself as I sit here now but by reflection from that which then I shall be"). By overloading the "now" with metaphors of passing the *Wake* compels us to think time from a position that is not grounded in eternal self-presence. It replaces this ground with a singular movement of flow and counter-flow—a peculiar currency in which no unit of time is equal to itself, much less computable; in which, therefore, the passing of time can only be figured as self-difference or excess.

Notes

1. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 249. All references to Joyce's fiction will henceforth be given parenthetically in the main text. Quotations from *Ulysses* (*U*) refer to the Penguin 1992 publications, based on the Random House/Bodley Head edition of 1960. Quotations from *Finnegans Wake* (*Fw*) follow the edition published by Faber and Faber, London, and The Viking Press, New York, 1939. I shall also

refer to Roland McHugh's *Annotations to 'Finnegans Wake'* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1991) for the occasional explication of a particularly obscure Joycean word. References to McHugh are given in square brackets within the quotation from the *Wake*.

2. "Time is invention," Bergson will say, "or it is nothing at all."

3. Readers of *Ulysses* will be reminded here of the importance accorded to the motif of micturation in that novel. Peeing establishes a symbolic correspondence between the protagonists: it kicks off Bloom's day with "a fine tang of faintly scented urine" (*U* 65) and crowns his nightly encounter with Stephen in a memorable description of their parallel, yet dissimilar urinations (*U* 825). In chapter X of *Finnegans Wake* the twins seem to be re-enacting that very same scene (and the set of relations which it brings into play): but where Stephen and Bloom reflect on womankind and her moon-like "potency over effluent and reflux waters" (*U* 824), Shem and Shaun contemplate mother earth and the eternal flow of her cycles.

4. Interestingly, in one of his many attempts to justify his use of the pun in *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce once declared: "it is not my fault that God made the same organs serve two purposes." *James Joyce: the Critical Heritage*, vol. 2, ed. Robert H. Deming (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 532–533.

5. For a detailed analysis of the significance of the circle in the structural organization of *Finnegans Wake* see Clive Hart's *Structure and Motif in 'Finnegans Wake'* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1962), especially chapters II (pp. 44–71), IV (109–128) and V (129–144). Highly pertinent to the present discussion is Hart's summary of the *Wake's* narrative design in terms of the following geometric model: "Around a central section, Book II, Joyce builds two opposing cycles consisting of Books I and III. In these two books there is established a pattern of correspondences of the major events of each, those in Book III occurring in reverse order and having inverse characteristics." (66–67).

6. Among the critics to have expressed doubts about the opportunity of linking the *Wake's* last and first sentence are Margot Norris in *The Decentered Universe of 'Finnegans Wake'* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 139; and Tony Thwaites, *Joycean Temporalities* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), p. 199.

7. To this effect Shem observes that an "Ideal Present Alone Produces Real Future" (*Fw* 303).

8. Lewis speaks of a "torrent of matter [that] is the Einsteinian flux. Or (equally well) it is the duration-flux of Bergson—that is its philosophical character at all events." *Time and Western Man*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 103.

9. The numerous Einsteinian resonances which clutter the episode have been commented upon by Laurent Milesi, who re-reads the Joyce-Lewis polemic as a war of styles and rhetorical stances. According to Milesi Joyce's principal objective in creating Professor Jones's extravagant idiom was to expose Lewis's patently incongruous and self-contradictory rhetoric—a rhetoric which constantly undermines the philosophical agenda for which it is a vehicle. "Unlike Lewis's sloppily bellicose prose, the linguistic strategies tapped by Joyce's text are indissociable from his narrative and thematic priorities." Laurent Milesi, "Killing Lewis with Einstein: 'Secting Time' in *Finnegans Wake*," *Teems of Times*, ed. Andrew Treip, *European Joyce Studies* 4 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), p. 12. Jones's lecture is filled with countless "deferrals of arguments or lapses into 'temporisation'" and with "many uncontrolled references to time or the *Zeitgeist* that eventually suggest Lewis's own time obsession." (Ibidem). By contrast, the *Wake's* recourse to puns and unpredictable verbal constructions can be seen to match Joyce's relativist inclinations challenging the unity and integrity of the word as minimal unit of signification—or, to keep Milesi's relativist metaphor going, as "atom-signifier." It bears emphasizing, however, that this is an awkward and problematic contrast. One cannot help observing that the rigid binary contraposition of Joyce and Jones, which even Milesi is tempted to reaffirm, only gives Lewis the ironic last word.

10. Bergson maintains that "[t]he intellect is not made to think *evolution*, in the proper sense of the word." He defines evolution as "the continuity of a change that is pure mobility"—a mobility considered to be irreducible to abstract thought, to figuration, and to quantitative analysis. "Suffice it to say

that the intellect represents *becoming* as a series of *states*, each of which is homogeneous with itself and consequently does not change." *Creative Evolution* 179.

11. This notion is meant to complicate, without refuting it, David Hayman's interpretation of the *Wake* as an "inverted world" which we enter by "follow[ing] the 'riverrun' backwards from the sea as in the playback of a filmstrip. . . ." David Hayman, "Farcical Themes and Forms in *Finnegans Wake*," *James Joyce Quarterly*, 11: 4 (1974), p. 340.

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