

Notes on “Seriousness”

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Most things in the world have by now been denaturalized; and most things, once they have been denaturalized, will register as inadequate or pernicious ideas to us until our new ideas themselves become naturalized and we are compelled to begin taking some of the old ones seriously again. One of these things is the sensibility—both possible and impossible to periodize, a variant of aesthetic judgment but necessarily discrepant from it—of “seriousness” itself.

A “sensibility (as distinct from an idea),” as Susan Sontag posited exactly half a century ago, is no longer “one of the hardest things to talk about.”¹ On the contrary, it has for many begun to seem like one of the easiest.² But there are special reasons why seriousness, in particular, has been for the most part passed over in silence. It is neither a categorically positive nor a categorically negative sensibility, if there be any such. Indeed the essence of seriousness is its apolarity: its availability to any and every charge. And seriousness is generic—an apparatus, even, of generification. We have just one recent study of it, Lee Siegel’s *Are You Serious?: How To Be True and Get Real in the Age of Silly* (2011), a cultural history of seriousness’s idioms and an exfoliation of its most basic virtues that some reviewers have still found to be too serious.³ To talk about seriousness is therefore to risk embodying it. If the seriousness can be defended, it will be for the light it sheds on one thing of which we all partake irrespective of the antagonisms we may be unprepared to see resolved.

For myself, I plead the goal of being allowed to be serious, and the goad of something both more and less than sincerity in my own sensibility. I am strongly drawn to seriousness, and almost as strongly sent packing by its demand that I think about it as a “natural” thing. That is why I don’t really want to talk about it, and why I’m going to use the ambulatory, epigrammatic style of Sontag’s “Notes on ‘Camp’” in my first efforts to do so. For no one who shares in unfashionable ideas will feel comfortable speaking wholeheartedly about them; she can only, through some attempt at a “methodological atheism,”⁴ try to show how they can be just as radical as other ideas depending on when, by whom, and with what motives they are used. To renaturalize a sensibility, to “draw its contours and recount its history”⁵ while allowing it to announce itself as something universally and distinctly human, requires a deep revulsion modified by sympathy.

These notes are for Laura (Riding) Jackson.

“But suddenly it seemed to me that angels had for a long time been left out of people’s conversation, as if there were no more angels, just as there are no more birds of certain kinds that there used to be—or as if there had never been any angels, and people had invented them, for stories, and then grown tired of them. Suddenly I felt that angels ought to be brought back into people’s conversation.”

—“The Serious Angels: A True Story”⁶

1. To start very generally: seriousness is, as Siegel's study begins by postulating, "the modern person's soulfulness."⁷ It is one way of seeing the world as still requiring, as he puts it, "the ballast that religion once provided."⁸ That way, the way of seriousness, is understood not in terms of doctrine, but in terms of the degree of "Attention, Purpose, and Continuity" we are able to obtain and sustain in our lives.⁹ Siegel refers to these secularized precepts as "the three pillars of seriousness."¹⁰
2. To emphasize religiosity is to slight religion, or to introduce an attitude that is neutral and potentially skeptical with respect to religion. The Dutch philosopher Benedict de Spinoza was excommunicated for thinking about religion in this way. "By 'God's direction,'" he explains in his *Theological-Political Treatise* (published anonymously in 1670), "I mean the fixed and unalterable order of nature or the interconnectedness of all natural things."¹¹ His crime was that this is *all* he meant by "God's direction."
3. Transcendentalist and Pragmatist thinkers in the United States would take on a similarly subtractive relationship to religion, influenced in part by an emergent liberalism within Christianity. It was the signal purpose of William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) to draw out and rescue the "experience" of religion from religion's cultural identities and political institutions (a gesture that would be turned into a program and in turn woven into the very text used by Alcoholics Anonymous members beginning in 1939, with the publication of Bill Wilson's *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism*).¹² John Dewey's *A Common Faith* (1934), a slimmer and more forceful volume than James's *Varieties*, sought essentially to do the same: "I am not proposing a religion," Dewey asserted, "but rather the emancipation of elements and outlooks that may be called religious."¹³ Dewey was particularly suspicious of "the *identification* of the ideal with a particular Being, especially when that identification makes necessary the conclusion that this Being is outside of nature."¹⁴ More pointedly, he argued, "A humanistic religion, if it excludes our relation to nature, is pale and thin, as it is presumptuous, when it takes humanity as an object of worship."¹⁵
4. There can be no canon of seriousness if, in James's words, "'religion', whatever more special meanings it may have, signifies always a *serious* state of mind"¹⁶—or if "the divine shall mean for us only such a primal reality as the individual feels impelled to respond to solemnly and gravely, and neither by a curse nor a jest."¹⁷ In her elaboration of "attachment as a *structure* of relationality," Lauren Berlant notes that "the experience of affect and emotion that attaches to [our] relations is as extremely varied as the contexts of life in which they emerge."¹⁸ Attachments "might *feel* any number of ways," she insists, "from the romantic to the fatalistic to the numb to the nothing. I therefore make no claim about what specific experiential modes of emotional reflexivity, if any, are especially queer, cool, resistant, revolutionary, or not."¹⁹ Something analogous must be claimed of the formal or expressive varieties of serious experience: seriousness might *look* any number of ways; it might even look like "a curse" or "a jest."
5. In the nineteenth century, of course, seriousness did find itself developing an affinity for certain cultural forms over others, and a taste for the historically marginalized form of poetry in particular. As the English critic Matthew Arnold urged his fellow Victorians, "We should conceive of poetry worthily, and more highly than it has been the custom to conceive of it. We should conceive of it as capable of higher uses, and called to higher destinies, than those which in general men have assigned to it hitherto."²⁰ Of "our religion" and "our philosophy," he would ask, ruminating on a passage from Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, "what are they but the shadows and dreams and false

shows of knowledge? The day will come when we shall wonder at ourselves for having trusted to them, for having taken them seriously; and the more we perceive their hollowness, the more we shall prize ‘the breath and finer spirit of knowledge’ offered to us by poetry.”²¹

6. In the substance of Arnold’s claims on behalf of “culture” at large, there may be nothing too much for us to take offense at. He defined culture as merely yet powerfully—as powerfully as Kant’s “mere reason” itself²²—the “free speculative treatment of things.”²³ And he saw it, moreover, as correspondent with “the view,” articulated in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), “in which all the love of our neighbour, the impulses towards action, help, and beneficence, the desire for stopping human error, clearing human confusion, and diminishing the sum of human misery, the noble aspiration to leave the world better and happier than we found it,—motives eminently such as are called social,—come in as part of the grounds of culture, and the main and pre-eminent part.”²⁴ Culture was, in this formulation, a “social” aspiration as much a spiritual one, and did not necessarily favor one manifestation of itself over another. Siegel’s study appropriately begins with an account of Arnold’s particular kind of seriousness: “Understanding that religion was under siege by Darwinist ideas and the forces of science and technology, Arnold prescribed a substitute for the waning faith in God. He called it ‘high seriousness’.”²⁵ The clearest description of high seriousness yielded by Arnold’s “The Study of Poetry” (1880) is of something, anything, but poetry especially (from Arnold’s vantage), “which gives to our spirits what they can rest upon.”²⁶ For his part, Siegel objects to two things in Arnold’s conception of high seriousness: that it “it abided only in culture” and not in everyday life,²⁷ and that it “left out the importance of levity.”²⁸

“My kind of seriousness, in my looking to poetry for the rescue of human life from the indignities it was capable of visiting upon itself, led me to an eventual turning away from it as failing my kind of seriousness.”

—“Author’s Introduction,” *The Poems of Laura Riding*²⁹

7. A common account of the American writer Laura (Riding) Jackson will present her as a one-time avant-gardist, a prolific poet of the 1920s and 30s and, with collaborator Robert Graves, an intellectual forerunner of the New Criticism who would ultimately disavow poetry and abandon her talents to archaic, totalizing, and totalitarian conceptions of world renewal. As Ella Zohar Ophir has remarked on what became, in her estimation, (Riding) Jackson’s increasingly “apocalyptic vision”³⁰ after World War II, “Here we find Lewis with his proposals for the disenfranchisement of the masses, Pound with his fascistic radio broadcasts, and Eliot with his Christian Society. Here too is Riding, imagining away the ‘ordeal of Difference called the ‘universe.’”³¹ One of two post-renunciation texts of (Riding) Jackson’s tends to figure in such a reading: either *The Telling* (1972), with its meditations on modern society’s deficiency of “faith” in what is variously invoked as “the Whole Story,” “the One Story,” or “sheer one-being”³²—the book notoriously characterized by (Riding) Jackson as “a personal evangel”³³—or her and her husband Schuyler B. Jackson’s posthumously published *Rational Meaning: A New Foundation for the Definition of Words* (1997), with its equally anachronistic “purpose of mind to make manifest possessed awareness, productive of complete rightness of expression.”³⁴

8. Ever alert to the ways in which she was read, (Riding) Jackson was accustomed to this kind of characterization of her non-poetic work. She lived until 1991, which meant that her “career,” as Jo-

Ann Wallace points out in a 1992 article, “rubbed against the three most important literary critical movements of the last sixty years: New Criticism, feminism, and deconstruction.”³⁵ In what would have been an introduction to a new collection of her poems and essays (had the project not been canceled by two separate publishing firms, first in 1964 and again in 1966³⁶), she offered a long disclaimer: “I digress a little here to give a warning that may be useful to readers. My being prompted to do so I owe to the pious disgust felt towards my terms of discussion by one who, priding himself on being the salt of modern poetic criticism, was put by chance into contact with some of my unpublished writing on poetry, and could not resist casting progressivist scorn on my thought, as of antediluvian date-quality. Particularly, among my terms of discussion, did the word ‘spiritual’ excite froth of repugnance in his critical mouth. Therefore I say to readers, Be prepared to find that word here! May the warning forestall the shock the word apparently produces in the Darwinian sensibilities (which I had thought had become somewhat antediluvian themselves). For, in the case of the person in question, the shock caused so much confusion, in conjunction with others produced in other sets of educated sensibilities by such words as ‘truth’, ‘perfection’, ‘goodness’, that *what* I said with these and other (not *yet* obsolete) despised words apparently swam like a scene seen through sea-sickness before his eyes: he read nothing straight. Perhaps readers, forewarned, will bear with me better in my use of old-timer words. Looming up immediately, additional to those already mentioned, is ‘ideal’.”³⁷

9. As a taste for seemingly “antediluvian” notions, (Riding) Jackson’s kind of seriousness obtained in a logic she unapologetically called “the straight.” In a 1990 conversation with her biographer Elizabeth Friedmann she elaborates as follows: “The principle of the straight line is the principle of vision. There is a self-repetition in a straight line, productive of continuity, self-renewal. Vision perceives in a straight line.”³⁸ Certainly nothing too queer, cool, resistant, or revolutionary so far in (Riding) Jackson’s valuation of straightness—and if left at this we could perhaps see the reason for putting her politics out to pasture with those of Lewis, Pound, or Eliot. Yet she goes on to observe how, “in the writings of Dürer, you find his conception of a straight line expanding itself into a cone. The terminology used by Dürer in his notebooks is this: ‘The painter...draws all seen things into one cone towards the eye, whose point is in the eye and whose base or foundation is the seen thing, and the measure of this, as persons experienced in geometry and perspective know, cannot be attained without special trouble.’ The principles of my writing,” she concludes, “are the principles of vision.”³⁹ In Dürer and (Riding) Jackson’s vision of vision, then, vision itself is no more than a kind of *measurement*. The line and the cone—the fixed and the kaleidoscopic, sameness and difference, the singular self and “all seen things”—do not actually compete for power or special privileges; there is no “apocalyptic” final judgment or revelation to hope for in the unfolding of their relationship with one other. From (Riding) Jackson’s perspective, the poetry critic’s charge of antediluvianism in her thinking would have been missing the whole point if it mistook for the real flood—the discursive and contextual waters that were its own job to navigate—some imaginary Biblical one.⁴⁰

10. (Riding) Jackson’s kind of seriousness, what she aimed to delineate not as *the* truth but as a “style of truth,”⁴¹ took special trouble to remove the quotation marks, the “scare” quotes, from those concepts central to the admittedly “spiritual lexicon”⁴² that she found her contemporaries had lost their willingness to reckon with. For example, “In the word ‘spirit,’ there is no moral tyranny,” she would offer, “though it has old favor among us as a moral preen-word...worn meaning-thin from bold use, timid use, division between contexts of evil and contexts of goodness; but we must save it from ourselves for ourselves.”⁴³

11. Over the course of her writing life, (Riding) Jackson reports, she was occasionally “accused, with teasing intent, of endeavoring to renew the poetic gospel of Matthew Arnold. “The accusation,” she would hold, “has serious point.”⁴⁴ In her introduction to the 1980 edition of her collected poems, she addresses Arnold directly. By her lights, “He was right in judging human sensibility, the integrity of human mentality itself, to be in a crisis condition. But what he prescribed was only an athletically earnest, a vigorously sincere, version of literary gospel. It perpetuated an aristocratic tradition, a higher-lower level-distinction in human aspiration and attainment, a superiority in human mentality and sensibility that should be capable of determining the dominant trend in human behavior by standards of custom.”⁴⁵ For all the democratic openness of Arnold’s denotation of culture as the “free speculative treatment of things,” his increasing investment in the canonicity of a given genre would inevitably have him claim, as he does in “The Study of Poetry,” that “if we conceive thus highly of the destinies of poetry, we must also set our standard for poetry high, since poetry, to be capable of fulfilling such high destinies, must be poetry of a high order of excellence. We must accustom ourselves to a high standard and to a strict judgment.”⁴⁶ Though (Riding) Jackson acknowledged that Arnold “had a real cause, a cause outside of himself” to which she could relate her own project, it was impossible for her kind of seriousness to take seriously his kind of seriousness once she saw it congealing, in the postwar decades especially, into a particular aesthetic ideology—into a “Cult of Failure” (as she had already begun to read the symptoms in the late 30s)⁴⁷ that was failing to adequately judge *itself*. In *The Telling* she would pause to invite her own readers to exact a reflexive judgment of this sort, writing, “It is for each to find or not find good what I have been saying, and even if it is found good, the judgment itself must be put under judgment.”⁴⁸ What reasons have we, her work tried to make people ask themselves, for continuing to take seriously a form whose current cultural conditions all but deny it the honor of fallibility?

12. As she had framed the problem more broadly, “Though literature has been important to men, we have no way of assessing its specific effects for good or evil.”⁴⁹ Largely reduced, she felt, to a “disorderly experimentalism”⁵⁰ that no longer recognized the need to test its own hypotheses, literature unmoored from “any comprehensive basis of judgment”⁵¹ had become, in her view, a “fictive spiritual feat,” an activity performed in “a spiritual theatre or fairground”⁵² to feed “the contemporary appetite for religion without religion.”⁵³ In a 1975 article originally published in *Modern Language Quarterly*, (Riding) Jackson observed how “[t]he word ‘ambiguity’ has become, in less than fifty years, a banner word in a certain kind of poetic criticism in which there presides a thematic justification of ambiguity as a central, necessary, fundamental device of poetry.”⁵⁴ Here her objection wasn’t to linguistic ambiguity itself, but to how the fathers of contemporary literary criticism had “converted and borrowed the method into an imitative exercise”⁵⁵ and come to present it as “a gospel of ambiguity.”⁵⁶ As Siegel speculates, “It could be that seriousness is vulnerable to physical laws, like bread. It grows stale when left out too long.”⁵⁷ Or as Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* might put it more aggressively: “For enlightenment is totalitarian as only a system can be. Its untruth does not lie in the analytical method, the reduction to elements, the decomposition through reflection, as its Romantic enemies had maintained from the first, but in its assumption that the trial is prejudged....”⁵⁸

13. Siegel’s study of seriousness, similarly dissatisfied with the aesthetic circumscriptions and seemingly ineluctable arrogance of Arnoldian high seriousness, will likewise find it necessary to distinguish between two kinds of seriousness. Siegel begins etymologically, reporting that in Old English the word meant “‘heavy’ or sad’.”⁵⁹ He then offers his own “fanciful origin of the term,” explaining how, in Spanish, “You use *estar* to describe a mood or an emotion” but “use *ser* to describe identity or the particular traits that make up the essence of a person. *Estar* implies

temporariness; *ser* connotes permanence.”⁶⁰ In his extrapolation, “You might say that *estar* is an artificial state of being because it is contingent on the forces that create our moods and cause them to change. *Ser*, on the other hand, is wholly natural. It is how we live in clarity and conscientiousness. *Ser* is organic seriousness.”⁶¹ It should go without saying that the kind of seriousness endorsed by Siegel is that of the “organic” variety, which he opposes to a caricatured or “official” sort.

14. A pocket history of organic seriousness, Siegel notes, might begin with Socrates, who as “Athens’s gadfly philosopher, made it his job to puncture such official seriousness, all in the name of being serious.”⁶² In Book X of Plato’s *Republic*, we can observe, Socrates famously warns Plato’s brother Glaucon that if they allow poets to remain in their hypothetical *polis*, “pleasure and pain will be kings in your city instead of law or the thing that everyone has always believed to be best, namely, reason.”⁶³ What a careful reading of Socrates’ dialogue with Glaucon really shows us, though, is that when poetic language becomes aware of itself as a rhetorical negotiation between imitative and ideal forms—or, more specifically, when “its defenders, who aren’t poets themselves but lovers of poetry, [can] speak in prose on its behalf...to show that it not only gives pleasure but is beneficial both to constitutions and to human life”⁶⁴—then imitation and pleasure, which humans cannot help but commit and seek, and reason, which in fullest adequacy belongs to the gods and which humans must ceaselessly work to access, are restored to a kind of symmetry, if not a kind of parity. “[W]e’d certainly profit,” Socrates admits, “if poetry were shown to be not only pleasant but also beneficial. How could we fail to profit?”⁶⁵ When Socrates notes that “the love of this sort of poetry”—what would have been lyric and epic poetry, ca. 380 BCE—“has been implanted in us by the upbringing we have received under our fine constitutions,”⁶⁶ the love not of poetry-in-general but of a specific ideological trend in poetry is judged inadequate. It is only when a form of rhetoric becomes hallowed beyond *all* reason, Socrates suggests, that “we are well disposed to any proof that it is the best and truest thing.”⁶⁷ Without evidence of its specific effects for the present, he insists, we must “go on chanting that such poetry is not to be taken seriously or treated as a serious undertaking with some kind of hold on the truth, but that anyone who is anxious about the constitution within himself must be careful when he hears it and must continue to believe what we have said about it.”⁶⁸

15. In fact, (Riding) Jackson did write the occasional poem after World War II, as Socrates himself, under certain conditions, would make use of rhetorical tactics more frequently deployed by his usual adversaries, the sophists. Foreshadowing his own trial and execution at the end of Plato’s *Gorgias*, Socrates submits that “it wouldn’t be at all strange if I were put to death” for practicing what he wagers to call “the true political craft” and “the true politics. This is because the speeches I make”—“speeches” everywhere represented in Plato’s dialogues as the formal antagonist to Socrates’s concise, dialectical method of *elenchus*—“on each occasion do not aim at gratification but at what’s best. They don’t aim at what’s most pleasant. And because I’m not willing to do those clever things you recommend,” he admits to his interlocutor (here the sophist Callicles), “I won’t know what to say in court.”⁶⁹ As (Riding) Jackson clarifies for Friedmann when asked to speak to the apparent contradiction between renouncing poetry and continuing to write poems: “...I have not immured myself in a monastic commitment to self-abnegation in regard to the trial of poetic possibilities to a straightness of utterance. I give way in these instances to a free-will impulsion to take advantage of the special potency of poetic speech as allowing a forceful avoidance of the delay in communicative advance, the circuitous linguistic spaciousness of which prose allows. This potency inheres in poetry.”⁷⁰ As for the poems themselves, she maintains, “I wrote them as poetic brevities of incidental emergency...as a person committed to peaceful procedures may on very rare occasions use his fists.”⁷¹

16. In her “Introduction for a Broadcast,” a statement aired by the BBC in 1962 and afterward published in the New York journal *Chelsea*, (Riding) Jackson for the first time explicitly addressed what she called “the question of seriousness.”⁷² For her it had become the only adequate question, a golden compass of intuition and response by which each, regardless of his or her coordinates, might apprehend more universally felt inadequacies in “the human-world environment”⁷³ than an Arnoldian faith in culture, let alone a single category of literature, could enable one to apprehend. But it was a question around which the coordinates of judgment—of the imagined moral capaciousness of spectatorship, of the “free speculative treatment of things”—themselves needed to shift. “The apparent contradiction,” she would thereby proclaim, “between the concept of the self as the animate essence of individuality and the concept of self as the spirit of responsibility, or soul, dwelling in individual being and making it act with supra-individual reference is a reflection of a false dilemma. There is not real duality of selfhood, only a difference between limited and whole seriousness of being.”⁷⁴

17. We hear an echo of this philosophical shift in Sontag’s “Notes.” As the piece will come to reveal, “Camp taste turns its back on the good-bad axis of ordinary aesthetic judgment. It doesn’t reverse things. It doesn’t argue that the good is bad, or the bad is good. What it does is to offer for art (and life) a different—a supplementary—set of standards.”⁷⁵ We also observe how Sontag actually requires, as her essay develops, a certain kind of seriousness, something other than “traditional seriousness,”⁷⁶ to undergird her elucidations of the camp sensibility. “There is seriousness in camp (seriousness in the degree of the artist’s involvement),” she suggests.⁷⁷ The “pure examples” of it are “dead serious”;⁷⁸ and although camp may be “playful, anti-serious,” it “[m]ore precisely... involves a new, more complex relation to ‘the serious’. One can be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious.”⁷⁹ Yet there would remain something necessarily “limited” for (Riding) Jackson in any epistemological picture that upheld, as Sontag’s theory of camp does, a fundamental opposition between “a sensibility” and “an idea.” In Sontag’s analysis, “Camp taste is, above all, a mode of enjoyment, of appreciation—not judgment.”⁸⁰ And there would remain something necessarily “limited,” too, about any reconstructed seriousness that, like Siegel’s formulation of “organic seriousness” as “clarity and conscientiousness”—or at most as “doubt”⁸¹—falls short of ever needing to use its fists.

“Anger is noble and whole-hearted, as judgment is noble and whole-minded. We should greet its appearance in ourselves as a sign that thought has made its way into our very bones. Indeed, I should be inclined to make the bones, rather than the heart, the seat of anger. Is this not what we have meant, and laboured, to be: all-of-a-piece beings? That which distresses the mind should make the very bones—our mutest parts—protest? Since what rejoices the mind gives the bones peace, this is surely not too much co-operation to expect from them.”

—“In Defence of Anger”⁸²

18. One must distinguish between a kind of judgment that is experienced transcendently and one that is felt, so to speak, “in the bones.” In her influential lectures on Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* held at the New School in 1970, Hannah Arendt spoke of the first kind. “The advantage the spectator has is that he sees the play as a whole, while each of the actors knows only his part or, if he should

judge from the perspective of acting, only the part of the whole that concerns him. The actor is partial by definition.”⁸³ For (Riding) Jackson, the actor is whole by definition.

19. One of Arendt’s fellow contributors to *Partisan Review*, Lionel Trilling, offered his own series of lectures at Harvard on broadly related matters, also in 1970. These Norton Lectures were published two years later as *Sincerity and Authenticity*, which would turn out to be Trilling’s final book. A dense, undulating tract on the history of its eponymous “moral idioms,”⁸⁴ the study eloquently restages the putative epistemic shift in post-Enlightenment Western culture from values and expressions of “categorical judgment”—exemplified for Trilling by the philosophy of Rousseau, the figure of the “honest” soul, the 18th- and 19th-century English working classes, and the trope of sincerity—to values and expressions of “dialectical judgment,” exemplified by the philosophy of Hegel, the concept of disintegration, the European and American bourgeoisies, and the trope of authenticity. Trilling had spent most of his career (a career launched by the publication of his doctoral dissertation on Matthew Arnold) determined to carry some kind of torch for what he claimed was the “more strenuous moral experience” at least “suggest[ed]” by “[t]he word ‘authenticity’.”⁸⁵ But he had come to find, in more recent times, that the terms of discourse around authenticity’s “originative power”⁸⁶ (a power he’d tended to ascribe to certain kinds of novels) had largely descended into “an intellectual mode that once went under the name of cant.”⁸⁷ As he would speak of it later, “Where I reject the idea of authenticity and seek to bring it into discredit is, how shall I put it, in its deteriorated form.”⁸⁸

20. A symposium was held at Skidmore College in 1974 to discuss Trilling’s study. About halfway through, the psychologist and social critic Leslie H. Farber turned to his fellow panelists and remarked: “I like what I’ve been hearing, but I’m a little perplexed. I don’t use the words ‘sincerity’ and ‘authenticity’ very often in my speech,” he explained, “yet I’m so taken by Professor Trilling’s descriptions that I’ve wanted to make up words for them myself. For example, I thought about ‘sincere’ for a while and decided that a word I’m more apt to use is *serious*. I don’t know just what to use for ‘authenticity’.”⁸⁹ Irving Howe, another of the symposium’s participants, then proposed the word “Genuine,” which also palpably missed the mark. “Genuine, yeah,” Farber responded. “But I do want to preserve in this if we can the view that there is such a thing, suggested by sincerity, as telling the truth, honesty. Fair enough?”⁹⁰ “Oh, fair enough,” Trilling agreed.⁹¹

21. According to Trilling’s study, which had itself registered the very impasse in sensibility that the current roundtable of distinguished New York intellectuals was struggling to synthesize into a legible third term, the discourse of authenticity and its attendant mode of dialectical judgment—of “being” and “becoming” as opposed to “having”⁹²—appeared to have entered a stage of acute “weightlessness.”⁹³ This manifested variously, Trilling argued, in an increasing valorization of the “spirit of play” and of play’s imagined equivalence with “truth”;⁹⁴ in a “drastic reduction in the status of narration, of telling stories,” or in “the act of *telling*” more simply;⁹⁵ and in “a sudden impatience with the idea of the organic.”⁹⁶ According to Trilling, these weightless or “deteriorated” iterations of authenticity, rather than compelling the social superego into a mode of restorative guilt over such misroutings of its own desires, had instead been sublimated into a pious, individualistic privileging of “an upward psychopathic mobility”: “the view that insanity,” so to speak, “is a state of being in which an especially high degree of authenticity inheres.”⁹⁷ In Trilling’s analysis, the only possible antidote to these widespread forms of aesthetic idolatry would have been a necessarily melancholic or tragic reckoning with the “falsities of an alienated social reality.”⁹⁸ Yet contemporary society, he complained, had “rejected” this antidote in favor of a false religion of “madness (to use the word cant prefers),” the latter compensating for the former with moral and political deferrals promising

something like “divinity, each one of us a Christ—but with none of the inconveniences of undertaking to intercede, of being a sacrifice, of reasoning with rabbis, of making sermons, of having disciples, of going to weddings and to funerals, of beginning something and at a certain point remarking that it is finished.”⁹⁹

22. Toward the end of the symposium at Skidmore, Trilling would boldly locate “the great sin of the intellectual” in the charge “...that he never tests his ideas by what it would mean to him if he were to undergo the experience that he is recommending.”¹⁰⁰ Yet his own study, despite its stated desire to resurrect an “archaic” mode of judging, one which “knows that things are not what they become but what an uncorrupted intelligence may perceive to be of them first,”¹⁰¹ is itself exquisitely dialectical in form, adhering precisely to the mode of critique it seeks to dethrone and laboring only to do it masterfully well. It keeps safely at arm’s length, that is, the “militant categorical certitude” and “immediate and pragmatic judgment” that Trilling permits himself to appreciate through a lengthy close reading of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (a passage so central to his study that he will be moved to read it aloud at Skidmore) but that he nevertheless subordinates to his own writing’s reliance on a Hegelian model of history and a Freudian model of the mind—wherein a restored authenticity, he contends, may yet lie in wait for us.¹⁰² As Amanda Anderson’s recent appraisal of Trilling alongside his peers at *Partisan Review* allows us to see, Trilling was a thinker whose “...own form of liberalism was a forceful rejection of progressivism, and who typically worked through stronger, tragic, religious visions without endorsing them directly.”¹⁰³

“I composed *The Telling* not so much from a height above as a position of temporal levelness with my contemporaries. I felt, speaking there, *on time*. The others? The most I felt to be hiding from the common immediateness in little evasive immediacies of their own, all pledging community in a vague language of self-concern while defrauding one another of it.”

—*The Telling*¹⁰⁴

23. In dialectical judgment, the essential element is what Kant terms “moral feeling.”¹⁰⁵ It is a common sense for the good arrived at from outside, above, or *before*, as we see in the third *Critique*’s analysis of the dynamically sublime in nature and its potential for stirring in us “an ability to judge ourselves independent of nature.”¹⁰⁶ In categorical judgment, the essential element is intuition. It is a sense for the common good arrived at immanently that does not depend for its moral power on the “apparent contradiction” between nature and freedom. Trilling can be seen to be speaking intuitively when, in the closing paragraphs of *Sincerity and Authenticity*, he offhandedly calls for something that “used to be called seriousness” as an activity of judgment that might simply yet reliably prevent us from “assent[ing]” to certain socially atomizing ideologies too “facilely”¹⁰⁷—as his colleagues at Skidmore seem to be doing as well.

24. (Riding) Jackson’s *The Telling* is an exercise in intuition. More specifically, it is a testing-out of intuition’s capacity to communicate in “*serious simplicity of truthfulness*”¹⁰⁸ without defaulting to traditional humanism’s more private (or privatized) versions of seriousness, truth, and subjectivity. In a later section of the book entitled “Extracts from Communications,” (Riding) Jackson extends a note of encouragement to one of her correspondents: “You are not afraid of meeting a circumstance, or a possibility, in the simplicity of unguardedness of spirit. Some, capable of such

simplicity,” she ventures to compare, “are diffident in it (there being much in the sophistications of their social environment to make them so), and seek backing for it in what seems its like in the notions of others. Thus, the most uninfected with conventionalized attitudes can be caught up in naïve philosophies that conventionalize their natural human simplicity....”¹⁰⁹ In a letter reproduced in her memoirs, she urges another correspondent to encounter her work with a similar “unguardedness of spirit”: “I judge that for a study of my work to be useful for you, you need to develop a point of view about it that is simple, and that is so by being a point of view that takes its cues from the work. If you get that,” she suggests, “then you will move naturally into a capability of seeing the work in its complexities within a firm frame of understanding.”¹¹⁰

25. A wholly serious encounter with intuition will perceive intuition to be, in and of itself, wholly serious. In Berlant’s account of it, “Intuition is where affect meets history, in all of its chaos, normative ideology, and embodied practices of discipline and invention.”¹¹¹ In this particular understanding of intuition—as “the contact zone between the affects and their historical contexts of activity, a zone of inference that, as it encounters the social, will always shift according to the construction of evidence and explanation”¹¹²—there is nothing facile about intuition.

26. Though we may experience intuition as “a zone of inference,” the hallmark of whole seriousness is the spirit of hypothesis. In *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1935, 1959), Karl Popper defined “the empirical method” as merely “[a] manner of exposing to falsification, in every conceivable way, the system to be tested.”¹¹³ As he states at the outset of his study: “The theory to be developed in the following pages stands directly opposed to all attempts to operate with the ideas of inductive logic. It might be described as the theory of *the deductive method of testing*, or as the view that a hypothesis can only be empirically tested—and only *after it has been advanced*.”¹¹⁴ This book was Popper’s major contribution to the philosophy of science, but it also offered an implicit critique of the ways in which the ostensibly scientific methods of Marxism and psychoanalysis had often seemed, in his own early enculturation to them, to evade historical testing as they themselves slowly gained in cultural capital of their own. Put simply, he writes, “The point is that, whenever we propose a solution to a problem, we ought to try as hard as we can to overthrow our solution, rather than defend it.”¹¹⁵

27. In an essay written in the late 70s, (Riding) Jackson reflects on an ambitious project undertaken four decades earlier. As she narrates it, “I crowned my years of industrious literary idealism with the composition of a series of moral determinations that became the substance of a pamphlet of the title *The Covenant Of Literal Morality*.”¹¹⁶ This “Covenant,” published in 1938 by her and Graves’ Seizin Press, had begun as a signature-seeking document circulated to roughly seventy of their peers around the world shortly after their return from Spain to England at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. “With this Protocol,” it asserted, “we institute a plenary action of judgment against evil. The action starts within us, in the mind; and, as it spreads personally from one to the other of us, our individual condemnations of evil will become a compact power to incapacitate the evilly disposed.”¹¹⁷ Yet this exercise in applied cosmopolitanism was also one of the last things that Riding, the poet, would publish for almost twenty years. In what reads very palpably like an Augustinian confession, (Riding) Jackson writes, “*I erred*. I presented them, each, with the opportunity that the Covenant voiced as with a book, to keep, if they wished, closed except to their own eyes. And they at once retreated with it into their privacies.”¹¹⁸ Further, she discerns, “I used a leniency of literary pattern, literary orientation, because of my having judged the terrain of literature to be the ground on which the explicit realization of the goodness of being I felt to be vested in the human form of being as a destiny both personal and universal must be initiated.”¹¹⁹ And finally, she determines,

“What I did, in formulating the Covenant, was to offer an opportunity to some of those with whom I had encounter, and to them the opportunity of offering the like to some of those with whom they had encounter, a way to put themselves to the test of moral effectuality—to test the moral effectuality of their being human beings. Yet they were not confronted with any ultimate reckoning of their success or failure in the experiment. There were no risks written into the opportunity. No records would be kept. The commitment to the formulations carried no necessary consequence of disgrace for evading entire conforming to them in personal action.”¹²⁰

28. (Riding) Jackson’s *The Telling*, though it will ultimately urge its readers to “beware of parting from the religions”¹²¹ and consider itself to be “spiritually a finality,”¹²² nevertheless begins with a statement on the value of empiricism. As its “Nonce Preface” puts forward, “The power of scientific criticism lies in the effect of its master-accusation ‘Nonsense!’ on the intellectual conscience of those whose thinking it is, actually, powerless to evaluate.”¹²³ (Riding) Jackson invokes this “Science fiesta” anthropomorphically, referring to it as an “unpleasant personality,” but characterizes its presence as “a gift to all who operate, or think of themselves as operating, on the ground of general knowledge with better than commonplace knowledge of it. ‘Have I checked the results of my operations for nonsense?’ is the question it makes one rudely ask oneself.”¹²⁴

29. Popper himself admits that he is “inclined to think that scientific discovery is impossible without faith in ideas which are of a purely speculative kind, and sometimes even quite hazy; a faith which is completely unwarranted from the point of view of science, and which, to that extent, is ‘metaphysical’.”¹²⁵ For Pragmatism, too, the religious mood and the scientific mood were seen to “work hand in hand.”¹²⁶ But there would be degrees of seriousness to consider. As James lays out one of his leading distinctions in “The Will to Believe” (1896), “A live hypothesis is one which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed. If I ask you to believe in the Mahdi, the notion makes no electric connection with your nature—it refuses to scintillate with any credibility at all. As an hypothesis it is completely dead. To an Arab, however (even if he be not one of the Mahdi’s followers), the hypothesis is among the mind’s possibilities: it is alive. This shows that deadness and liveness in an hypothesis are not intrinsic properties, but relations to the individual thinker. They are measured by his willingness to act. The maximum of liveness in an hypothesis means willingness to act irrevocably. Practically, that means belief; but there is some believing tendency wherever there is willingness to act at all.”¹²⁷

30. A live hypothesis is wholly serious both ontologically and behaviorally. It presents as what James’s *Varieties* calls “a total reaction upon life.”¹²⁸ And it might, when necessary, present as unpleasant. As James asks the question elsewhere, “Is all ‘yes, yes’ in the universe? Doesn’t the fact of ‘no’ stand at the very core of life? Doesn’t the very ‘seriousness’ that we attribute to life mean that ineluctable noes and losses form a part of it, that there are genuine sacrifices somewhere, and that something permanently drastic and bitter always remains at the bottom of its cup?”¹²⁹

31. In the context of her cultural and intellectual environment, (Riding) Jackson’s kind of seriousness can be read as spectatorship alive to the optic and motivational force of affect. But it can also be read as spectatorship alive to an affect of *enthusiasm* in particular. In his recent article “Rites of Dissent: Literatures of Enthusiasm and the American Revolution,” John Mac Kilgore observes that a literature inflected with “[e]nthusiastic affect corresponds to the essential historical presupposition of enthusiastic society: ‘immanence of spirit’ invested horizontally in the public,” as he quotes from Richard Lovejoy’s *Religious Enthusiasm in the New World: Heresy to Revolution* (1985).¹³⁰ Kilgore elaborates that a literature of enthusiasm—which he emphasizes “is not so much a genre of

literature as it is an enthusiastic use of various genres”—will call “not for a disinterested public of readers, but for a collective (popular) conversion of the immediate context, which presupposes the responsibility of subjects to change their reality without recourse to any authority other than a democratic imperative.”¹³¹ An “enthusiastic affect” might therefore commit minimally, as (Riding) Jackson’s kind of seriousness would have it, to “temporal levelness” and to “common immediateness” with its object(s), neither of which can begin to cohere through thinking or feeling alone. “Our feelings supply our minds with information about what is,” as she would articulate her position in 1936, “and out of this information our minds make a knowledge of what should be. Our minds then educate our feelings, giving them the only kind of knowledge which is emotionally intelligible: a knowledge of what should not be.”¹³²

32. We note across her body of work that Spinoza was one of the only philosophers for whom (Riding) Jackson ever expressed any enthusiasm. It was his treatment of intuition, in particular—what he alternately termed “intuitive science” and an “intellectual love of God”—that spoke most convincingly to her notion of whole seriousness. “Spinoza especially recommended the cultivation of what he denominated a ‘third kind of knowledge’,” she relates in a later essay, “beyond the illuminations of imagination and those of reason, drawing on intuitive speeds of direct penetration of the essence of the knowable.”¹³³ What she valued in Spinoza’s thinking was not only its heretical philosophical orientation, its substance monism, but its situated “attempt to introduce spontaneities of the human intellect into static philosophical and doctrinal pieties.”¹³⁴ She rejected, by contrast, “[t]he dialecticians of the false historical truth... (this humanitarianism of a procrustean male sort),” those who “avail themselves of our silence to make their noise of argument-stimulating-the-sound-of-reason.”¹³⁵ “I cite Spinoza,” she reports more generally, “for the practicality of his concerns of thought with the problem of human identity.”¹³⁶ It can be no accident that the bulk of *The Telling* is formatted to mirror the numbered, propositional structure of Spinoza’s *Theological-Political Treatise*, a text whose most basic thesis is that, in Spinoza’s words, “True joy and happiness lie in the simple enjoyment of what is good and not in the kind of false pride that enjoys happiness because others are excluded from it.”¹³⁷

33. In a recent study of Spinoza, Hasana Sharp offers a helpful breakdown of the tenets of Spinoza’s “parallelism,” which her book argues “sets the stage for a radical naturalism that redefines human existence and agency in several ways: a) thought is irreducible to matter, and yet does not have a unique spiritual logic that distinguishes it from (other attributes of) nature; b) mental life is not confined to human, rational, or spiritual beings; and c) thought and extension, mind and body, are not involved in a struggle for control.”¹³⁸ Sharp’s book, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*, borrows the term “renaturalization” from Elizabeth Grosz but begins by taking stock of the importance of *denaturalization* as a critical methodology that can “reveal how power structures depend upon their ability to mystify their historical and bloody origins. Occluding the contested processes by which capitalism, bourgeois sexuality, European superiority, or patriarchy is constituted,” Sharp acknowledges, “naturalistic ideologies represent such systems as unalterable expressions of human nature.”¹³⁹ It is her “conviction,” she adds, “that we cannot advocate the naturalization of humanity without taking the history of naturalistic ideology seriously... I cannot simply bring ‘nature’, ‘the body’, or ‘matter’ back without reworking them in response to the concerns of feminists, race theorists, or the Marxist traditions of critical theory.”¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, her work contends, although “appeals to nature are never without risks, the critical impulse of denaturalization has generated a set of polemical binaries that, even if necessary in certain contexts, merit challenge and reconceptualization.”¹⁴¹

“I think a large part of the work will prove to be the mere learning not to set limits...The task is not to instal [*sic*] stronger lights, so as to see better in the same places. We must put in an entire new lighting-system, one that covers more ground, illumines places we have treated as not there.”

—*The Telling*¹⁴²

34. A renaturalized seriousness turns its back on the pendulum swing of conventional critique. It doesn't reverse things. It doesn't argue that weight must acquire weightlessness, that weightlessness must acquire weight. What it does is to offer for judgment a different—an “infinitely demanding”¹⁴³—set of standards.

35. Sharp's recourse to the concept of renaturalization finds its justification in both the theoretical and the practical benefits to which Spinoza's thought can lend itself if we begin with the understanding that “Nature, on Spinoza's model, is not opposed to history.”¹⁴⁴ In one of her stronger articulations of this position, she suggests that “[u]nderstanding humanity as vulnerable to the same determinations as beasts, rocks, and vegetables facilitates harmony and political emancipation. Only when we consider ourselves to be constituted by our constellations of relationships and community of affects can we hope to transform the forces that shape our actions and characters. When we regard ourselves as being within nature, we affirm the passionate basis of activity and respond more effectively and knowledgeably to harms, sorrows, and threats, as well as to pleasures, joys, and promises.”¹⁴⁵ In a chapter on Althusser's theory of ideology renaturalized through a closer correlation (closer than it already admits to having¹⁴⁶) with Spinozist precepts, Sharp emboldens us to “[i]magine our ideas as living, growing, and changing things that may also require revision, critique, or pruning. The project of ideology critique, from a renaturalist perspective, is not content to recognize pernicious or damaging ideas and affects circulating in one's environment. It requires an ongoing practice of sustenance and attention to new insights, promising ideas, and counterhypotheses, seeking amenable ambient forces that might allow them to take root and become adequate for increasingly many thinking powers.”¹⁴⁷

36. Though James and Dewey did not explicitly align their own interventions with Spinoza's, they did, by comparison, aim to reassign to human thought and action a lens wider than that of empiricism or rationalism alone. They sought what Hent de Vries has called “a nonbisected rationality”¹⁴⁸—“a *minimal theology*,” he terms it interchangeably—which, in de Vries's formulation, “would have to do justice both to the accumulated wisdom of the world *and* to the ever weaker, yet ever more demanding, appeal of the infinite.”¹⁴⁹ For James, it was precisely some degree of belief in an “unseen order,” an “overbelief,” that he felt could stimulate the most morally strenuous of characters and lead not only to the most “robustious type of thought,”¹⁵⁰ but more radically to what he described as a potentially “infinite scale of values.”¹⁵¹ And Dewey's project was even more “robustious.” As he would conclude his lectures that became *A Common Faith*, “Ours is the responsibility of conserving, transmitting, rectifying and expanding the heritage of values we have received that those who come after us may receive it more solid and secure, more widely accessible and more generously shared than we have received it. Here are all the elements for a religious faith that shall not be confined to sect, class, or race. Such a faith has always been implicitly the common faith of mankind. It remains to make it explicit and militant.”¹⁵²

37. Though (Riding) Jackson did explicitly align her own interventions with Spinoza's, her theorizations of affect differed from his in at least one important way. Whereas Spinoza judged anger to be a unilaterally passive or inadequate emotion, (Riding) Jackson judged there to be more than one kind of anger. Her finding it necessary to distinguish between the two is what allowed her to take anger more seriously on the whole.

38. "Anger is a precious emotion," as she would first propose in a 1936 essay written for her and Graves' periodical, *Epilogue*. "It is perhaps the only critical emotion." But "[b]y anger," she clarifies, "I do not mean the fury of hate. I mean that spontaneous rejection of something which is an act of solemn, not vindictive, dissociation from it."¹⁵³ Whereas hatred indexes "a sense of outraged privacy," she notes, anger indexes one of "outraged affinity."¹⁵⁴

39. What Riding will eventually be moved to call "true anger" is different from "any other counterfeit anger"¹⁵⁵ in its temporal disposition especially. Anger "is precious," she contends, "because it is momentary: it is a momentary act of dissociation which makes a basic review of an association possible—compels a basic review."¹⁵⁶ And "[t]he kind of association in which anger occurs may vary: it may be a close personal relationship, or an association through assumed membership in the same social or professional body, or one based on an axiomatic assumption of membership in humanity, or on a courteous assumption of membership in a liberally inclusive order of intelligence and decency. But anger can only occur where some association exists. Its occurrence precipitates a re-evaluation of the association," and "it is precious because it makes the association severely immediate, bringing it out of the kindly past or the lazy future and setting it on the worktable of the present."¹⁵⁷

40. In this treatment of anger's potential for whole seriousness—for *adequacy*, in the Spinozist sense—anger is welcomed as "a concrete and natural gesture; it is no mere speculation, but something we do."¹⁵⁸ It is in this way that Riding's early "Defence of Anger" flies in the face of both Spinozist and Kantian ethics by insisting on the powerful organicism—on the wholeness as much as the interconnectedness—of the angry person or the otherwise implicated actor. "To foreswear anger, and with it, necessarily, the right of protest," it concludes, "is to sacrifice one's critical sensibilities to an ideal of genial vagueness with other people—in which there can be no real pleasure, only a feeling of temporary security from irritation."¹⁵⁹ This formulation of anger's adequacy for moral feeling is particularly at odds with Kant's vision of sublime experience and the preeminent moral power it locates in the individual mind's *a priori* "strength (which does not belong to nature...)"¹⁶⁰ to observe and judge the world from what Kant calls "a safe place."¹⁶¹ As Rebecca Comay has glossed it, "Revolution is in this way relinquished, mourned, and resurrected. Renounced at a local level, no longer constrained by national frontiers, partial interests or partisan commitments, or trivialized by the contagious effects of fanaticism or empathy, the event is reinstated in the spectator's surge of moral self-exaltation."¹⁶²

41. A renaturalization of judgment in postwar American culture thus quickens in the conversion of seriousness into a certain kind of anger. We see an example of this quickening in Angela Y. Davis's decision, for instance, to return to the U.S. in 1967 after two years of graduate school undertaken in Frankfurt. As a pamphlet circulated in 1972 by the National United Committee to Free Angela Davis describes it, Davis was beginning "to formulate the topic for her doctoral thesis—Kant's philosophical concept of freedom, as it related to the Black liberation struggle," when "[w]hat had begun as an escape from racist America grew to seem to her an exile from the struggle of her Black brothers and sisters in America."¹⁶³ In a 1970 letter to his former pupil, Herbert Marcuse would

acknowledge Davis's brilliance as a scholar of French and German intellectual traditions but note that he reserved his deeper admiration for how she had brought these traditions to bear on her own social and political activities. He quotes directly from her dissertation prospectus—Davis's insight that "[t]he notion (in Kant) that force provides the link between the theory and practice of freedom leads back to Rousseau..."¹⁶⁴—in order to highlight what he sees as the corresponding link between Davis's own theory and practice. In Marcuse's words, "...you took seriously what they said, and you thought seriously about it, and why all this had remained mere talk for the vast majority of men and women. So you felt that the philosophical idea, unless it was a lie, must be translated into reality: that it contained a moral imperative to leave the classroom, the campus, and to go and help the others, your own people to whom you still belong—in spite of (or perhaps because of) your success within the white Establishment. But you fought for us too," the letter concludes, "who need freedom and who want freedom for all who are still unfree. In this sense, your cause is our cause."¹⁶⁵

42. One is drawn to the renaturalization of seriousness when one realizes that the reconstruction of seriousness is not enough. Siegel's study of seriousness, while it succeeds in pluralizing the forms that seriousness can take, will ultimately claim that "wholly natural" or "organic" seriousness must be "free from the pressures of necessity, utility, or duty."¹⁶⁶ This definition domesticates what almost but never quite becomes the whole seriousness of Siegel's study; one might say it clips its wings. For a writer like J. M. Coetzee, by contrast, the renaturalization of seriousness will obtain in a sense of duty as much as it will begin with a hypothesis of "severely immediate" association. As Coetzee puts it, "Seriousness is, for a certain kind of artist, an imperative uniting the aesthetic and the ethical."¹⁶⁷

43. The traditional means for arguing a serious ethical or political position seem feeble to one of Coetzee's best-known characters, the novelist Elizabeth Costello. In *The Lives of Animals* (1999), we learn that the elderly Costello has been a writer of "pathbreaking feminist fiction" around whom "a small critical industry" now exists—that "there is even an *Elizabeth Costello Newsletter*, published out of Albuquerque, New Mexico."¹⁶⁸ She has been invited to speak at the Waltham, Massachusetts liberal arts college at which her son, an assistant professor of physics and chemistry, teaches, but "has responded by electing to speak, not about herself and her fiction, as her sponsors would no doubt like, but about a hobbyhorse of hers, animals."¹⁶⁹ That "John is glad he doesn't share his mother's surname"¹⁷⁰ is one of the first things Coetzee's free indirect discourse tells us about the way in which Elizabeth Costello's kind of seriousness is going to bristle more broadly against the seriousness of the intellectual community at the fictional Appleton College.

44. Coetzee presents a vision of the college, and of its Humanities departments in particular, that everywhere insinuates the structural, social, and moral limitations of the institution that John's character is often intuitively on the brink of finding inadequate but that he never wholly permits himself—or is permitted—to critique. The lecture, we discover with him, will be "introduced by Elaine Marx of the English Department. He does not know her but understands that she has written about his mother. In her introduction, he notices, she makes no attempt to link his mother's novels to the subject of the lecture."¹⁷¹ At the post-lecture dinner, "Dean Arendt" is described as "entering the debate for the first time" (in other words, belatedly) with the concession that he is "prepared to accept that dietary taboos do not have to be mere custom. I will accept that underlying them are genuine moral problems. But at the same time one must say that our whole superstructure of concern and belief is a closed book to animals themselves...In the lives of animals," he thereby judges, "things, good or bad, just happen. So vegetarianism is a very odd transaction, with the beneficiaries unaware that they are being benefited. And with no hope of ever becoming aware. Because they live in a vacuum of consciousness."¹⁷² But it is John's wife Norma, an analytic

philosopher, whose vitriol for Costello is so strong that John, who can be “proud” of his mother as she arrives at Appleton, still cannot be “sure that he wants to hear her once again on the subject of animal rights, particularly when he knows he will afterwards be treated, in bed, to his wife’s disparaging commentary.”¹⁷³ As Coetzee’s narrator puts it, Norma had “never hesitated to tell him that his mother’s books are overrated, that her opinions on animals, animal consciousness, and ethical relations with animals are jejune and sentimental. She is at present writing for a philosophy journal a review essay on language-learning experiments upon primates,” and John “would not be surprised if his mother figured in a dismissive footnote.”¹⁷⁴

The subjects of modern appreciation
Are all at slants, classifiable by
The direction of the slants. There is no straight.
The most prizing praise obliquely singles out
A something standing out obliquely
From the generality of the oblique regulars.

[...]

But who, now, in this date of the intelligence,
Can speak preference with the outright voice of love?

—“Lamenting the Terms of Modern Praise”¹⁷⁵

45. It is not uncommon to hear the charge that veganism (or even the moral consideration of animals more generally) must be the prerogative of an elite of one kind or another. Infuriated by Costello’s talk at Appleton, for instance, Norma “snorts” that it is “nothing but food-faddism, and food-faddism is always an exercise in power. I have no patience,” she complains of her mother-in-law, “when she arrives here and begins trying to get people, particularly the children, to change their eating habits. And now these absurd public lectures! She is trying to extend her inhibiting power over the whole community!”¹⁷⁶ Here we notice, however, how Norma’s objection to Costello quickly lapses from a critique of power—and from a potentially serious discussion of the socioeconomic privilege that often helps to facilitate a vegan position or lifestyle—into what is more likely a rationalization of the terms of her own liberal taste culture. “Perhaps,” John responds. “But why not try to see her as a preacher, a social reformer, rather than as an eccentric trying to foist her preferences onto other people?”¹⁷⁷ This proposition notwithstanding, John continues to have a difficult time getting Norma to take his mother seriously.

46. Like (Riding) Jackson’s *The Telling, The Lives of Animals* is an exercise in intuition—a record of judgment alive to its own renaturalizaion. “I am not a philosopher of mind,” Costello will insist at one point in her talk, “but an animal exhibiting, yet not exhibiting, to a gathering of scholars, a wound, which I cover up under my clothes but touch on in every word I speak.”¹⁷⁸ As Cora Diamond has written of the book (which, like many of the sources for these “Notes,” also began as a series of talks): “Coetzee gives us a view of a profound disturbance of soul, and puts that view into a complex context...What response we may have to the difficulties of the lectures, the difficulties of reality,” she suggests, “is not something the lectures themselves are meant to settle.”¹⁷⁹ Yet we are profoundly unsettled in reading Coetzee’s lectures, which succeed at the very least in eclipsing the

common-sense view of contemporary veganism as an expression of outraged privacy with a live hypothesis of it as a practice of outraged affinity.

47. (Riding) Jackson herself anticipated the ecopolitical *esprit* of whole seriousness. In particular, she anticipated the same limited seriousness of much posthumanist discourse that Coetzee's writing does, finding it not only possible but necessary for our responsibility to non-human nature to reserve some distinct role, and something beyond mere reason, for human beings. As she writes in one of her early *Epilogue* essays, "Man is a separate being, but he is not an independent being. He exists only as he relates himself to the unique through his own consciousness of not being unique. Relation is the only permissible principle of duality."¹⁸⁰ She offers a definition of the word "ANIMALS," elsewhere, as "living things of a kind like living things of human kind that have earth as their special site of life—but who unlike those of humankind, do not mingle with one another but follow their individual courses of habit according to the ways of their kind."¹⁸¹ And in *The Telling*, finally, she will refer to animals as "creatures of limited being-range"¹⁸² and to humans—not by contrast but by complement—as "creatures suffused with nature's whole intention...who must see for it, do for it, try to make ourselves what it has tried to make. I say these things of us not in praise," she insists—for "[i]f this were all, which now we are, betrayers of the spirit, cheaters of nature, would best describe us."¹⁸³

48. Whereas a philosopher like Hannah Arendt (or a dean like Dean Arendt) would argue that "the trick of critical thinking does not consist in an enormously enlarged empathy through which one can know what actually goes on in the mind of all others,"¹⁸⁴ a novelist like Costello would say that "there is no limit to the extent to which we can think ourselves into the being of another."¹⁸⁵ There is no limit, in other words, to the extent to which humans can "mingle." Accordingly, from Costello's perspective, "The question to ask should not be: Do we have something in common—reason, self-consciousness, a soul—with other animals?"¹⁸⁶ The question to ask, instead, is whether we can open ourselves to "a faculty, *sympathy*, that allows us to share at times the being of another."¹⁸⁷

49. In Coetzee's kind of seriousness, then, we witness not only a renaturalization of judgment, but a renaturalization of the power of aesthetic forms themselves. Here the capacity for "poetic invention," as Costello puts it, for "mingling breath and sense in a way that no one has explained and no one ever will" is revitalized, made adequate again, once poetic effects begin to have more than the pleasure or displeasure of the autonomous human subject in mind.¹⁸⁸ As Costello points out to her audience, "If you had wanted someone to come here and discriminate for you between mortal and immortal souls, or between rights and duties, you would have called in a philosopher, not a person whose sole claim to your attention is to have written stories about made-up people."¹⁸⁹ And as she will attempt to drive home to a small group of variously interested and disinterested interlocutors during a post-lecture seminar, "If I do not convince you, that is because my words, here, lack the power to bring home to you the wholeness, the unabstracted, unintellectual nature, of that animal being. That is why I urge you to read the poets who return the living, electric being to language; and if the poets do not move you, I urge you to walk, flank to flank, beside the beast that is prodded down the chute to his executioner."¹⁹⁰

"An advent of truth will not provoke wonder, admiration, forcefully seize attention. Truth's nature is to fill a place that belongs to it when the place becomes cleared of a usurping occupant. It slips into place,

then, with a quiet of natural fitness, perfectly not-astounding in the rightness of its being there.”

—*The Telling*¹⁹¹

50. (Riding) Jackson began writing “The Serious Angels: A True Story” (1966) as a story—“a plain story”¹⁹²—for children. “Whether you believe that there are or ever were such things as angels, or not,” it begins, “when you say the word ‘angel’, or think about such things as angels, you have to think about the best kind of being that could be.”¹⁹³ The story notes that “[t]o some people, as you know, the name of ‘saints’ is given. These are mostly people who suffer for their goodness,” it explains, “and so become to other people an example of goodness. It is thought that after their death, as beings made up all of spirit, they have powers to help the living, each a special power; and many people still pray to saints, asking their help.”¹⁹⁴ By contrast, the story continues, “Some people pray to angels to do things for them. But that is almost like praying to someone in the same room as you. Saints are in heaven—are in heaven, if they are anywhere. But angels are everywhere—are everywhere if they are anywhere: they walk beside you, come and go freely between where you are and somewhere else, anywhere else—if they *are*.”¹⁹⁵

51. The important thing about (Riding) Jackson’s serious angels—these “livest” and “most quick-moving and quick-acting beings that can be thought of”¹⁹⁶—is that their immanence and their imperative of goodness can only become wholly serious to the extent that they mingle with the world. “Angels are beings who are enough, as beings,” the story will elaborate; “Nothing is missing from them. They will not come apart. They are like the World, they fit perfectly into the world; they are true citizens of the world, they are good.”¹⁹⁷ And we begin to see not only that “angels and people are related”;¹⁹⁸ more literally, the story discloses, “An angel is a person united with his or her teaching soul.”¹⁹⁹ Angels are not religious *symbols*, in this sense, but personalized forces of intuition that help us draw connections where and when there may appear to be none. Having begun her story of the serious angels with the intention of writing for children—in whose “toys,” stories,” and “explanations” more generally she felt there to be “something lacking”²⁰⁰—(Riding) Jackson then realizes how “[m]ost of what grown-ups give to one another for best is also a best cut down from whole-best. It is not so much cut down from whole best as children’s best is,” she suggests, “but it is not quite the same as whole-best.”²⁰¹

52. In her preface to the twentieth-anniversary edition of *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), Carol J. Adams reflects on what she describes as her many “years of trying to make sense of an intuitive glimpse at a connection” between different forms of inequality.²⁰² She begins, more broadly, with the assertion that “[e]quality isn’t an idea; it is a practice. We practice it,” she elaborates, “when we don’t treat other people or other animals as objects. We practice it when we ask ‘what are you going through?’ and understand that we ask the question because it matters to all of us what some are experiencing.”²⁰³

53. A video posted to YouTube in May 2013 shows a young Portuguese boy hesitating before his dinner.²⁰⁴ His mother is encouraging him to eat. “Ok mom,” the boy says, “alright... This Octopus isn’t real, right?” “No,” the mother replies. “Then alright,” the boy replies. “He doesn’t speak and he doesn’t have a head, right?” “He doesn’t have a head,” the mother assures him—“these are only the chopped little legs of the octopus.” “Huh?” the boy asks. “But... is his head in the sea?” “No,” the mother clarifies, “it is at the fish market.” “The man chopped it?” the boy asks, with a chopping gesture, “...like this?” To which the mother replies, “Yes he did.” “Why?” the boy asks. “So we can

eat it,” the mother explains. “Otherwise we’d have to swallow it all.” “But why?” the boy persists. “So we can eat it, love. Just like a cow is chopped, a chicken is chopped,” the mother reasons. The boy is confused; “Nobody eats chicken,” he insists. “Nobody eats chicken?” the mother repeats, astonished. “No,” the boy responds, “those are animals!” To which the mother replies, “Really?” To which the boy replies, “Yeah!” The mother again tries to get the boy to eat the octopus gnocchi. “Eat the potato then?” she pleads. “Just the potato and rice,” the boy consents. “Octopus are animals,” he points out to his mother as he begins to eat his potato and rice. “Alright,” the mother acknowledges. “All of them are animals,” the boy explains; “Fish are animals. Octopus are animals. Chicken are animals. Cows are animals. Pigs are animals.” To which the mother replies, “Yeah...” “So,” the boy continues, “When we eat animals they die!” To which the mother responds, “Yeah...” To which the boy replies, “Why?” “So we can eat, love,” the mother tries to reiterate. “Why do they die?” the boy asks; “I don’t like that they die. I like that they stay standing up.” “Ok. Alright,” the mother is moved to agree. “So we’re not gonna eat it anymore, okay?” “Okay!” the boy brightens. “These animals...you gotta take care of them,” he reminds her, “and not eat them!” “You’re right, son. So eat the potato and rice.” The boy asks, “Why are you crying?” To which the mother responds, “I’m not crying...I’m just touched by you.” “I’m doing something beautiful,” the boy suggests. The mother is still evidently crying. “No need to eat the octopus, alright?” Many of the users’ comments on the original YouTube post (which quickly went viral) would remark on how “non-judgmental” young Luiz Antonio appeared to be and yet how effectively he was able to change their hearts and minds, at least a little, about their everyday treatment and consumption of animals.

“We must be able to belittle (with our humor) or see as otherwise than it seems (with our love) or utterly deny (with our anger) that which falls upon our minds with destructive strangeness, and against which we have no other defences than our feelings.”

—“In Defence of Anger”²⁰⁵

54. Adams describes her “political and spiritual journey toward a feminist-vegan critical theory” as having begun the evening she returned home to her family’s farm after her first year at Yale Divinity School. An “agitated neighbor” came by to inform the family that someone had just shot her horse, and so her critical transformation, she relates, “...did not require that I travel outside this small village of my childhood—though I have; it involved running up to the back pasture behind our barn, and encountering the dead body of a pony I had loved.”²⁰⁶ Later that evening, she reports, “still distraught about my pony’s death, I bit into a hamburger and stopped in midbite. I was thinking about one dead animal yet eating another dead animal. What was the difference between this dead cow and the dead pony whom I would be burying the next day? I could summon no ethical defense for a favoritism that would exclude the cow from my concern because I had not known her. I now saw meat differently.”²⁰⁷

55. The “favoritism” observed and deconstructed by Adams’s groundbreaking study is given the name of “carnism” in recent work by psychologist and sociologist Melanie Joy. In *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows* (2010), Joy describes carnism as an ideology, one “especially resistant to scrutiny,”²⁰⁸ that not only “dictates which animals are edible,” but also “enables us to consume them by protecting us from feeling any emotional or psychological discomfort when doing so. The system teaches us how to *not feel*.”²⁰⁹ As Joy notes (and as many of us may *know*), “Contemporary carnism is

organized around extensive violence. This level of violence is necessary in order to slaughter enough animals for the meat industry to maintain its current profit margins. The violence of carnism is such that most people are unwilling to witness it,” she adds, “and those who do can become seriously distraught.”²¹⁰ Joy’s study of carnism in the United States includes in its sphere of concern the humans implicated and exploited in carnism’s institutions, frequent among them the industry’s undocumented workers “who receive little, if any, training.”²¹¹ It relates how, for example, “in 2005, for the first time ever, Human Rights Watch issued a report criticizing a single U.S. industry—the meat industry—for working conditions so appalling they violate basic human rights.”²¹² And it also helps us connect the dots between processes of meat production and “every significant form of environmental damage: air and water pollution, biodiversity loss, erosion, deforestation, greenhouse gas emissions, and depletion of fresh water.”²¹³

56. In an article posted in January of this year, a *Counterpunch.org* contributor writes: “While Angela Davis is well known for her progressive perspectives on race, gender, and class, less well known are her views on species, which are quite forward-thinking. The great socialist scholar, it might surprise some to hear, does not consume animal products.”²¹⁴ The author highlights a moment from a talk of Davis’ uploaded to the *Vegans of Color* blog in 2012. Davis hesitates a bit, but goes on to elaborate her position when asked a question about what relationship there might be, if any, between the aspirations and commitments of the Occupy movement and those of veganism. “I don’t talk about this a lot,” Davis proceeds, “but I’m going to do this today because I think it’s really important. The food we eat masks so much cruelty. The fact that we can sit down and eat a piece of chicken without thinking about the horrendous conditions under which chickens are industrially bred in this country is a sign of the dangers of capitalism, how capitalism has colonized our minds. The fact that we look no further than the commodity itself, the fact that we refuse to understand the relationships that under[lie] the commodities that we use on a daily basis... And so food is like that.”²¹⁵ It might surprise some to hear that Davis now takes veganism wholly seriously as part of a liberatory politics. But perhaps it should not.

57. In an undated letter included in her memoirs with the title “To Someone Seriously Concerned With My Work,” (Riding) Jackson indicates that it is “[t]his cutting me up into periods viewed as in themselves finalities of thought of mine, when there is on record further, more, [that] can prove obstructive to the full understanding of what I have been all this while doing, continuingly into what I *am* doing.”²¹⁶ An unsympathetic response to such a statement might respond with scorn for what appears to be (Riding) Jackson’s idiosyncratic or hubristic seriousness about her body of work. A sympathetic response to it, however, might sense (Riding) Jackson’s seriousness about her body of work—about the demystification or dereification of her *own* corpus—to be synecdochic for the kind of seriousness that she believed humans naturally bring to bear on any activity or critical operation that seeks to link as many causes as possible to any given set of effects and then feels the need to do something about them.

58. An illuminating insight into the genealogy of whole seriousness in our time: that Sontag herself took (Riding) Jackson wholly seriously. As *Chelsea* editor Sonia Raiziss would relate in a letter to (Riding) Jackson in 1968, “Here is something that might matter! Susan Sontag—whose name you must surely have seen here and there (she’s smack in the middle of today’s literary world, such as it is) became an enthusiast of your work, especially from the day she found your story ‘A Last Lesson in Geography’ in *Art and Literature*. She was so excited by it that she took out your *Progress of Stories* and xeroxed the whole of it... She is interested in all your work,” the note ends, “every phase of it, past and present; and she may be in a position to do something concrete.”²¹⁷

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Notes

I am grateful to Tim Terhaar for being my unofficial co-researcher on important aspects of this project over the last few years; to Elizabeth Friedmann for responding to a draft of this piece and for generously providing me with a transcription of Raiziss' letter to (Riding) Jackson (and for pointing out that (Riding) Jackson and Sontag even shared a birthday); for the many transformational conversations and ideas and the handful of equally transformational friendships I took with me from Hent de Vries's "Miracles, Events, Special Effects" seminar held at Cornell's School of Criticism and Theory in 2012; and to the editors of *World Picture* for their encouragement and patience as I worked to complete this piece. I dedicate these *Notes* to the memory of my recently departed grandmother, Marta Horvath, a serious angel if ever there's been one.

¹ Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'" (1964), *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux, 1966), 275.

² See, for example, Dierdra Reber's critique of "[t]he concept of affect-as-episteme," which, in her analysis of its discursive privileging of "homeostasis" in the humanities and social sciences in recent years, "allows us to understand that this project may contest capitalist empire, but...in no way moves outside its epistemological logic." Dierdra Reber, "Headless Capitalism: Affect as Free-Market Episteme," *differences* 23.1 (Spring 2012): 88.

³ As Donna Rifkind puts it in a review of Siegel's book for the *The New York Times*, "Reading him is a bit like observing the perfervid forays of a Victorian gentleman collector who's on the hunt through every corner of Western culture for serious and unserious specimens. His book would be a charmingly old-fashioned effort, if it were charming." She adds that Siegel "hasn't yet developed a style that rises above truculence or condescension. Until he does," she concludes, "he'll remain the grain of sand in the oyster that never quite becomes a pearl." Donna Rifkind, "The Age of Anti-Serious Seriousness," *The New York Times Sunday Book Review*, 29 July 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/31/books/review/are-you-serious-by-lee-siegel-book-review.html?_r=0 (accessed 22 April 2014).

⁴ In the 1960s, Peter Berger identified (but did not necessarily recommend) what he called "methodological atheism" as the most common contemporary approach to studying the role of religion in society. See *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

⁵ Sontag, "Notes," 276.

⁶ Laura (Riding) Jackson, "The Serious Angels: A True Story" (1966), *Chelsea* 69 (2000): 19.

⁷ Siegel, *Are You Serious?*, 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 47-57.

¹¹ Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* (1690), ed. Jonathan Israel, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 44.

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- ¹² William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (1902) (New York: Random House, 1994); Bill Wilson, *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous, 1939).
- ¹³ John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1934), 6.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 28, emphasis original.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.
- ¹⁶ James, *Varieties*, 43, emphasis original.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 44-45.
- ¹⁸ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 13, emphasis original.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, emphasis original.
- ²⁰ Matthew Arnold, "The Study of Poetry" (1880), *English Literature and Irish Politics*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1973), 161.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 162.
- ²² Immanuel Kant, "Religion within the boundaries of mere reason" (1793), *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 31-191.
- ²³ Matthew Arnold, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1864), *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 42.
- ²⁴ Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 59.
- ²⁵ Siegel, *Are You Serious?*, 2.
- ²⁶ Arnold, "The Study of Poetry," 177.
- ²⁷ Siegel, *Are You Serious?*, 3.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ²⁹ Laura (Riding) Jackson, "Author's Introduction," *The Poems of Laura Riding* (New York: Persea Books, 1980), xl.
- ³⁰ Ella Zohar Ophir, "The Laura Riding Question: Modernism, Poetry, and Truth," *Modern Language Quarterly* 66:1 (March 2005): 106.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 108.
- ³² Laura (Riding) Jackson, *The Telling* (London: Athlone Press, 1972), 28.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ³⁴ Laura (Riding) Jackson and Shuyler B. Jackson, *Rational Meaning: A New Foundation for the Definition of Words and Supplementary Essays*, ed. William Harmon (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 379.
- ³⁵ Jo-Ann Wallace, "Laura Riding and the Politics of Decanonization," *American Literature* 64.1 (March 1992): 111.
- ³⁶ See John Nolan, "Note on the Text," *The Failure of Poetry, The Promise of Language* by Laura (Riding) Jackson, ed. John Nolan (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 246-47.
- ³⁷ Laura (Riding) Jackson, "Then, and Now" (1964), *The Failure of Poetry, The Promise of Language*, ed. John Nolan (Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 2007), 55-56, emphasis original.
- ³⁸ Elizabeth Friedmann, "Laura (Riding) Jackson in Conversation with Elizabeth Friedmann," *PN Review* (Mar./Apr. 1991), 74.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁰ In her analysis of (Riding) Jackson's *Rational Meaning*, Carla Billitteri distinguishes between what she reads as the writer's Cratylism—her apparent commitment to "perfect naming" hearkening back to Plato's dialogue *Cratylus*—and an "Adamic" worldview. Billitteri observes how these positions "differ profoundly in their temporal orientations. The Adamic is primordial, hence backward looking; it refers to nature before the fall, and to a language adequate to that uncorrupted state. In

Cratylism, there is no fall; nature persists notwithstanding corruption, and language can be adequate—indeed, perfect—without having to return to a prelapsarian condition.” Carla Billitteri, *Language and the Renewal of Society in Walt Whitman, Laura (Riding) Jackson, and Charles Olson: The American Cratylus* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 11.

⁴¹ Laura (Riding) Jackson, “Introduction for a Broadcast: Continued for *Chelsea*” (1962), *The Failure of Poetry*, 28. In her introduction to *The Laura (Riding) Jackson Reader*, Friedmann concurs that for (Riding) Jackson, “truth is not a metaphysical mystery to be pursued but the natural expression of human consciousness. As she herself once put it, to a student of her work, “Truth cannot be stated; it is a kind of statement.” Elizabeth Friedmann, “Introduction,” *The Laura (Riding) Jackson Reader* (New York: Persea Books, 2005), xix.

⁴² (Riding) Jackson, *The Telling*, 138.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁴ (Riding) Jackson, “Author’s Introduction,” xxxv.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, xxxvii.

⁴⁶ Arnold, “The Study of Poetry,” 162.

⁴⁷ Laura Riding and Madeleine Vara, “The Cult of Failure,” *Epilogue* 1 (Autumn 1935): 60-86.

⁴⁸ (Riding) Jackson, *The Telling*, 93

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁵⁰ Thomas Matthew and Laura Riding, “The Idea of God” (1935), *Essays from ‘Epilogue’: 1935-1937* by Laura Riding and Robert Graves, ed. Mark Jacobs (Manchester, UK: Carcanet, 2001), 7.

⁵¹ Laura (Riding) Jackson, “The New Immorality,” *Under The Mind’s Watch: Concerning Issues of Language, Literature, Life Of Contemporary Bearing*, ed. John Nolan and Alan J. Clark (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2004), 253.

⁵² (Riding) Jackson, “Introduction for a Broadcast,” 25-26.

⁵³ (Riding) Jackson, *The Telling*, 178.

⁵⁴ Laura (Riding) Jackson, “On Ambiguity” (1975), *Rational Meaning*, 510.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 511.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 512.

⁵⁷ Siegel, *Are You Serious?*, 62.

⁵⁸ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “The Concept of Enlightenment,” *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (1947), trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 18.

⁵⁹ Siegel, *Are You Serious*, 11.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 59.

⁶³ Plato, “Republic,” *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1997), 1211, 607a.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1212, 608d.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 608e.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Plato, “Gorgias,” *Complete Works*, 864, 521d,e.

⁷⁰ Friedmann, “Laura (Riding) Jackson in Conversation with Elizabeth Friedmann,” 74.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Laura (Riding) Jackson, “Introduction for a Broadcast,” 25.

- ⁷³ Laura (Riding) Jackson, "Prospectus," *Under The Mind's Watch*, 26.
- ⁷⁴ Laura (Riding) Jackson, "Introduction for a Broadcast," 28.
- ⁷⁵ Sontag, "Notes," 286.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 287.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 288.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 282.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 288.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁸¹ Siegel, *Are You Serious?*, 59.
- ⁸² Laura Riding, "In Defence of Anger" (1936), *Essays from 'Epilogue'*, 97-98.
- ⁸³ Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 68-69.
- ⁸⁴ Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 2.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 12
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 169.
- ⁸⁸ Lionel Trilling et al., "Sincerity and Authenticity: A Symposium," *Salmagundi* 41 (Spring 1978), 96.
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 97, emphasis original.
- ⁹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁹² Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 124. Here Trilling quotes Arnold directly: "'Culture,' said Matthew Arnold, 'is not a having but a being and a becoming.' And Oscar Wilde, in his great essay, 'The Soul of Man under Socialism,' echoed Arnold: 'The true perfection of man lies not in what man has but what man is.' But it was of course not enough," Trilling's study would here begin to intervene, "to simply set being over against having and to assert that the one is to be preferred to the other" (124-25).
- ⁹³ *Ibid.*, 156-59.
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 131.
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 134, emphasis original.
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 128.
- ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 167.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 171-172.
- ¹⁰⁰ Trilling et al., "Sincerity and Authenticity," 109.
- ¹⁰¹ Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 80.
- ¹⁰² See the final part of Trilling's *Sincerity and Authenticity*, "The Authentic Unconscious," for an elaboration of this thesis (134-72).
- ¹⁰³ Amanda Anderson, "Character and Ideology: The Case of Cold War Liberalism," *New Literary History* 42 (2011): 217-18.
- ¹⁰⁴ (Riding) Jackson, *The Telling*, 102, emphasis original.
- ¹⁰⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (1790), trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1987), 128.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 120-21.
- ¹⁰⁷ Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 171.
- ¹⁰⁸ (Riding) Jackson, *The Telling*, 144, emphasis original.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹¹⁰ Laura (Riding) Jackson, "To Someone Engaged Upon A Study Of My Work," *The Person I Am: The Literary Memoirs of Laura (Riding) Jackson, Vol. 2*, ed. John Nolan and Carroll Ann Friedmann (Nottingham, UK: Trent Editions, 2011), 280.

¹¹¹ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 52.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 79.

¹¹³ Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1935, 1959) (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 20.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 78, emphasis original.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, xix.

¹¹⁶ Laura (Riding) Jackson, "A Covenant," *Chelsea* 69: 81

¹¹⁷ Laura Riding, "A Covenant of Literal Morality: Protocol 1" (London: Seizin Press, 1938), 11. Held in the Dorothy Simmons Collection of Laura (Riding) Jackson Letters, 1937-1968, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

¹¹⁸ (Riding) Jackson, "A Covenant," 85, emphasis original. See also Laura (Riding) Jackson, "A Reading by Laura (Riding) Jackson for recording by the Library of the University of Florida," *Chelsea* 69. It is in this 1975 statement that (Riding) Jackson explicitly likens the terms of her renunciation to those of Saint Augustine's some 1,588 years before her. Insisting on "no claim of grandeur in the comparison" (52), she cites the Bishop of Hippo's *Confessions* as "dramatically suggestive of the kind of difference I feel there to be between commitment to a career of poet and the alternative commitment to a career of labor for the release of the generality of human beings" (51). In her account of Augustine, (Riding) Jackson draws particular attention to the linguistic implications of his conversion in the garden at Milan: "Saint Augustine renounced the grave responsibilities of a professorship of Rhetoric, having decided 'gently to withdraw'—'not tumultuously to tear'—'the service of my tongue from the marts of lip-labor.' He wanted to transpose heart and tongue both from the literary skirmishings of academic Law to a conspectus of the nature of truth and its laws unbounded by prescriptions of utterance-forms, and forms of reasoning, to which the concerns of truth were subsidiary, if not altogether disregardable" (51-52).

¹¹⁹ (Riding) Jackson, "A Covenant," 85.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹²¹ (Riding) Jackson, *The Telling*, 39.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 84.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, 16.

¹²⁶ William James, "Lecture Two: What Pragmatism Means" (1907), *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, ed. Giles Gunn (New York: Penguin, 2000), 27.

¹²⁷ William James, "The Will to Believe" (1896), *Essays on Pragmatism*, ed. Alburey Castell (New York: Hafner Press, 1948), 89.

¹²⁸ James, *Varieties*, 40.

¹²⁹ James, "Lecture Two," 129.

¹³⁰ John Mac Kilgore, "Rites of Dissent: Literatures of Enthusiasm and the American Revolution," *Early American Literature* 48.2 (2013): 371.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Riding, "In Defence of Anger," 98. See also Howard L. Parsons, "Reason and Affect: Some of Their Relations and Functions," *The Journal of Philosophy* 55.6 (13 March 1958) for an example of work contemporaneous to (Riding) Jackson's that was likewise seeking to link (or relink) the operations of reason and affect. "The work of Peirce, James, and Dewey," Parsons notes, "has

already laid the groundwork for a logic rooted in feeling-response. So far as future developments go, we may anticipate that both logic and psychology, each in its own way elaborating the concept of unitary organism, will converge in their studies, and so reveal a much more intimate relation between reason and affect than we have heretofore imagined” (221).

¹³³ Laura (Riding) Jackson, “Body and Mind and the Linguistic Ultimate,” *The Laura (Riding) Jackson Reader*, ed. Elizabeth Friedmann (New York: Persea Books, 2005), 311.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 312.

¹³⁵ (Riding) Jackson, *The Telling*, 21.

¹³⁶ (Riding) Jackson, “Body and Mind,” 313.

¹³⁷ Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 43.

¹³⁸ Hasana Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 3.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² (Riding) Jackson, *The Telling*, 125.

¹⁴³ See Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London and New York: Verso, 2007). “The hypothesis here,” he writes, “is that there is a motivational deficit at the heart of secular liberal democracy,” one that “. . . is also a *moral* deficit, a lack at the heart of democratic life that is intimately bound up with the felt inadequacy of official secular conceptions of morality” (8-9). This is a hypothesis further explored by Critchley in his follow-up study, *Faith of The Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London and New York: Verso, 2012).

¹⁴⁴ Sharp, *Spinoza*, 8.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Sharp notes that Althusser himself cites Spinoza as “the inventor of ‘the matrix of every possible theory of ideology’” (58). In a passage on the character of ideology appearing in his most famous essay, Althusser will even suggest that, in the critique of ideology, to be “a Spinozist or a Marxist. . . in this matter, is to be exactly the same thing.” Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation” (1970), *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 119.

¹⁴⁷ Sharp, *Spinoza*, 74.

¹⁴⁸ Hent de Vries, *Minimal Theologies: Critiques of Secular Reason in Adorno and Levinas* (1989), trans. Geoffrey Hale (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 63, emphasis original.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁵⁰ James, *Varieties*, 428.

¹⁵¹ James, “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life” (1897), *Pragmatism and Other Essays*, 261.

¹⁵² Dewey, *A Common Faith*, 87.

¹⁵³ (Riding) Jackson, “In Defence of Anger,” 87-88.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

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