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Introduction

Thoughts Thinking Themselves

Thought thinks itself thinking, imagination pictures extended figures for itself, and union is experienced in the inattention of an activity that feels itself acting, and acted upon, without thinking about it.

—Jean-Luc Nancy

When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.

—from The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance

In Plato’s *Theaetetus*, Socrates characterizes the thought process as being an internal dialogue resulting in choice: “[the mind] asks itself questions and answers them, saying yes or no. And when it reaches a conclusion (which may take quite a long time or may involve a sudden leap), stops being divided and starts to affirm something consistently, we call this its belief.”1 But what if there appears to the mind to be no choice other than to be compelled to make the same choice repeatedly? The mind’s willingness to accept “no choice” as fact where it may well be only appearance produces the performance behavior of incapacity, the stuff of personal legend and artistic ascription.

Christopher Nolan’s film *Memento* (2000), whose protagonist Leonard Shelby suffers from short-term memory loss and has developed a system of (mis)remembering through body inscription, begins with a sequence that appears to reverse time toward its vanishing point—a crime scene photo whose image disappears the more the protagonist shakes it; the disappearance of said photo back into the Polaroid instant memory camera that snapped it; spilled blood flowing backwards on a tiled floor; the gun that shot the bloody corpse on the floor leaping back into the protagonist’s outstretched hand; the bullet shell casings from the gun stirring on the floor (as does the corpse) prior to leaping back into the muzzle of the gun. Although we don’t actually see it, for a moment we think we see Leonard jump back into the body of his baggy suit, into the embodied baggy-suit of remembering. The mind’s mental
circuitry intuits the mechanical strategy of telling Leonard’s story in reverse, a co-articulated incapacity that is ritualistic in the doing and non-ritualistic in the forgetting of it having been done. The body that jumps back into the baggy suit, though, is not Leonard’s so much as his ghosting of spectatorial desire not to know outside of protagonistic incapacity, not to remember that you cannot know you have short-term memory loss as Leonard does. This not-knowing enables the virtually impossible to become virtually possible, which is how film does its work and the mind does film. Incapacity, (the) film says, is the author of loss, and as such makes us believe not that we have no choice but that our choice is to have no choice.

This book models such self-pathologizing performance behavior. Wittgenstein says, “Introspection can never lead to a definition. It can only lead to a psychological statement about the introspector” (RPPI §212). This being said, this is also a book about self-delusion, beginning with the all-inclusive single word “mind” and the misleading, impossible image of the mental picture. To theorize the mind and the mentalistic is, per force, to generalize and so to overstate, while at the same time to render opinion. Neither the mind nor the “I” stands still for modeling, but we model them nonetheless. We know in context, and context does not stand still either, entering instead into the flow of life. Thought is a mental object, the mental object is an image, a picture, and above all, a language, or more properly, as Wittgenstein argues, a language-game. Language-games configure “the whole mind” (itself a misnomer) as a kind of central toolbox. And yet Wittgenstein has no interest in thought-reduction. He is anti-essentialist, opposed to any unified theory and offers none in his work. “I’ll teach you differences,” Wittgenstein says. As often as not, he illustrates via a negative—what is not the case, what cannot be said, what thinking-mind-the “I” are not, what “I” cannot do, and more generally what cannot be done. Wittgenstein shows us landscape (“perspicuous overview”), not location. In this, he is in tune with a certain vein in postmodern drama, the dialogic, self-interlocutory voice in his writing making the comparison to drama viable, useful, and evocative.

My concern is not brain process but self-consciousness (including memory), the constructedness of a reality that taunts us with the illusion of being unitary and internally visible to the introspective mind. Self-consciousness is self-selecting, self-isolating, and perversely self-sustaining, which is, in part, why I treat behavioral outliers like the criminal, the amnesiac, and the agoraphobe, to which I apply Wittgenstein’s self-nominated therapeutic philosophy for clarity’s sake and for perspectival relief. The peculiar nature of obsessive-compulsive and generalized anxiety disorder is such that the statements “I know what I am thinking” and “I know that I am thinking” are often confused in the mind, as well as in speech. The not-knowing that pertains to these two statements, that turns them into questions, speaks to a mental complaint (condition). Here thought plays language-games with itself and can lead to the performance of behavioral tics. Wittgenstein’s advice to
“regard the word ‘think’ as an instrument” (*PI* §360), rather than as a process, is a possible way of breaking the spell cast by the spectre of thought and its agent, what Wittgenstein called “the mysterious ‘I.’”

Wittgenstein accepts his own and philosophy’s limitations as regards explaining why the world is the way it is. He understands that thought can only proceed from the given circumstances *that* the world is and there is no need or possibility to explain (or to determine) this fact. Any discourse of meaning derives from the foregoing proposition, and any representation of the world is just that, a representation and not an explanation of the thing it represents. Early in his thinking, Wittgenstein posited a way of seeing the world as it is *sub specie aeterni*, from the outside, as “a limited whole,” in the form of a primary, material experience that, as David G. Stern summarizes, “looked at in the right way, presents one with insights that cannot be put into words. He conceived of the primary phenomena of immediate experience as a self-contained realm, a world outside space and time, in the sense that it contains a ‘now’ and a ‘here’ but no ‘then’ or ‘there,’ yet provides the basis for the spatial and temporal empirical world, the secondary system.”

It is not too much of a stretch to see that Wittgenstein was, at least at one time in his thinking, describing “liveness” and that his claim for liveness constituted as a limited whole provides a model for life. And with this proposition, Wittgenstein entered the realm of theater, of performance. But with this assertion, a potential stumbling block immediately presented itself. As Stern (who does not have theater or performance in mind in discussing Wittgenstein) has argued; “Even though nothing can be said, or even shown, concerning the primary world . . . Wittgenstein still thought its true nature could, under the right circumstances, ‘show itself.’ The struggle to express these extralinguistic insights into the nature of experience had led Wittgenstein to write in the *Tractatus* that ‘the world is my world.’” But when and how can performance’s true nature show itself, *my* world-inside-the-world, (of) which I have dreamed?

“Mental processes just are strange” (*PI* §363). The very strangeness of Wittgenstein’s philosophy can be seen in its protean effort to address the limits of enactment as a mental problem, a thought experiment that transforms the impossibility of theoretical performance into something more or less real through language, despite Wittgenstein’s internal resistance to doing so. Janik and Toulmin align Wittgenstein’s neo-Kantian philosophy (aimed at “solving the problem of the nature and limits of description”) with the pre-1914 Viennese intelligentsia’s critique of language (*Sprakhkritik*), itself a reaction to a society that was rife with top-down and spectrum-wide communication issues in art and politics, sex (and psychology) and philosophy (and within philosophy, in logic and ethics, ethics and aesthetics, facts and values). Such terms as “authentic language” (proposed by aesthetes) and “everyday language” (a platform on which Wittgenstein built his concept of the ordinary) were offered as solutions to the crisis in (the corruption,
duplicity, mystification of) language as cultural exchange. Citing Kant, who along with the mathematical philosopher Gottlob Frege greatly influenced Wittgenstein, Cora Diamond writes that “understanding . . . [like language and thought] in its correct use [is] in agreement not with some external thing but with itself.”

In struggling to ascertain the meaning of understanding’s agreement with itself, we are misled by external signs that inherently cite other signs, leading not so much to looking as to overlooking not only what a sign or object means but meaning itself, in the sense of what we mean when we think something. What is the “it” that means, the “itself” that understanding self-defines? As Diamond and others have posited and I have experienced, this is not so much a question as a problem, “like trying to move one’s ears when one has never done so, like trying to unravel a knot which one does not even know is actually a knot.” This is difficult enough, but additionally how does the mind avoid not-ting the knot into a solipsistic misreading of understanding as thoughts-thinking-themselves that predicate understanding on imaginary premises?

My mind gravitates to artists like Mac Wellman and Richard Foreman, of whose nonlinear thought-plays (discussed later in this book) it might be said the problem is the solution and understanding’s manifest agreement with itself may in part be explained by my own mental circuitry. My mind invents a complex of behavioral rituals and ritualistic thinking to safeguard against the risk-taking it considers already to have taken place in the imagining. Owing to this nominal fact, I am not so much comfortable with the thinking that such plays do as I am properly uncomfortable with a level of familiarity that my condition as a mentally impaired spectator does and does not want to believe can manifest understanding (without simplification and distortion) outside itself. I have likewise read Wittgenstein according to what my in/capacity will allow. “To dramatize is to think against the self,” the chorus (the nominal spectators’ surrogate) says in Wellman’s version of Antigone. My book, given its aim and the conditions that produced it, cannot help but speak against itself (and to a certain extent, against Wittgenstein), and so, so to speak, dramatize a shadow life in the art and the life that I represent.

Psychiatrists and neuropsychologists agree that I have (a) “quirky brain,” and that a part of my brain has overdeveloped, so that, in effect, my thought is constantly performing for itself in the extreme. This performance anxiety feels to me, as it does for Peter Handke, like “the weight of the world,” and I experience “myself” as “a ghostly event” I will never finish thinking through. And so, I intend to take up in this book Handke’s charge to “try to find another language for our obsessions, and make up adventure stories to go with them.” What does this mean? First, the conditions, the mental processes and events I describe and instantiate in relation to various kinds of performance—dramatic and narrative writing, stand-up comedy, film,
thought theater—hopefully say something about the nature of creativity or creative thinking, its reach and the grasp it regularly exceeds. Second, a discussion of such thinking opens up all manner of perception and understanding that might in an earlier day simply have been designated “irrational” and even “nonsensical,” the former being to my mind a function of thought and the latter its often calculated result. I hope to make my obsessions our obsessions. Think of me as your Leonard Shelby.

Actually, I think of death from morning to night almost without interruption, usually in a frivolous, off hand way, as though renewing some foolish bet with myself. \( ^{16} \)

Take up philosophy with the idea: Let’s see if it drives the fear out of me. \( ^{17} \)

The legend of performance-making is that it stares down death as a fiction of unknowing. Performance has no real memory of death, and is as frankly embarrassed by its own demonstrable limits as it is by the ontological self-doubt that these limits invite as actable ideas that in worst-case scenarios end in solipsistic defeat. Anxiety, as a performance behavior, has strangely become my bid for personal immortality. I know this for a fact, because I am now writing this all down in a book, which I began at the same age that Wittgenstein was when he died. I am wedded to my death (as fact or as idea?) and must periodically renew my vows, a silent ceremony of non-responsiveness from my intended over which anxiety, like death, presides with more gravity than presence. (“Death is not an event in life. Death is not lived through” [\textit{TLP} §6.4311].) From the beginning (\textit{TLP} §1), Wittgenstein tells us that in the beginning, “The world is everything that is the case.” The world is, like the word in its atomistic proposition, an encapsulated presence/present. It is non-hypothetical, premised on nothing but itself, timeless in the sense of obviating all time that is not present. My death is an intrusive or alien thought, death being something I can only “know” as imminence in the form of a premonition, despite my speaking of it as if it were a fact.

Imminence and, even more so, immanence, essentially borrow death from an unknown (idea of the) future, so that thinking of death appears to be a thought that is thinking itself outside the logical space that my present thinking inhabits. Solipsism posits a world that is scaled to my capacity for conceiving (of) it, knowing it, and yet death, being a non-event in my life, my world, is, in a formal sense, inconceivable, and so a margin of my incapacity. But it is our thinking that sets limits to what our minds can know and that convinces us we know what we cannot. And this “cannot,” which we don’t entirely know, ghosts through our thinking like a failure whose origin we can only fictionally cite. Fact attaches itself to the thought “cannot,” because context cannot abide thought’s non-participation.
Wittgenstein vests truth in the ordinariness of facts and in the fact that what all “truth-functional notations” have in common are rules. He presents these rules, these facts, as non-propositional propositions, whose elementary atomic structure is irreducible, monadic after Leibniz. Like context vis-à-vis thought, representation cannot abide the possibility of monadic self-containment, there being no ontological unit small enough of which representation cannot say, *Et in Arcadia ego*—even in the abstract ideal there is (not manifest death but) death as manifestness. And so representation in language aligns itself with elementary fact, a proposition with which Wittgenstein anxiously-reluctantly agrees by proposing that “the structure of the world is mirrored, or pictured, by the structure of language: all meaningful language is analyzable into ‘elementary propositions,’ logical atoms.” But language “disguises thought. So much so that from the outward form of the clothing [Wittgenstein here adopting a representational example] it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it.” It is the fact that “the tacit conventions on which the understanding of everyday language depends are enormously complicated” (TLP §4.002) that makes the ordinary so confounding in its extraordinary manifestness.

If you are unwilling to know what you are, your writing is a form of deceit.

I am mindful of how the book in hand troubles this notion by confounding and conflating the ordinary with the extraordinary. I note here the absence of neuroscience from my thought experiment, perhaps because it could see through the extraordinariness of personal example, although this absence likewise speaks to the incapacity that is this book’s subject. Still, Wittgenstein believed that a philosophy of mind need not be linked to scientific discovery, to technology, and that brain states are not necessarily synonymous with mental states, that is, with thoughts. “The willing self,” Wittgenstein suggests, “is not part of the world and, hence, there is no reason to suppose it will be countenanced by neuroscience.” The ordinary is not inevitably reclaimed as a technical concept in what is called Wittgenstein’s “insulation thesis of philosophy from science.” By allowing the mind its own illogical reasons and designs, as demanding in their way as those of medicine or neuroscience, I am responding to the charge of the general anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorders that have engendered this study.

The body does play an important and active role in my engagement with the mind as an engine and artifact of causality, within which I include reflex, effect, affect, and mortality: trans-dramatically speaking—inevitability. Obsessive-compulsives are always being told that they live too much in their minds, but they live too much in their bodies as well. Or more accurately, their minds live too much in their bodies and their bodies in their minds. The advantage of reading Wittgenstein in relation to an embodied
mental-performance paradigm is to engage with the self-modeling insulation philosophy so often invoked (in relation to science, among other things) and unfortunately, according to Wittgenstein, achieved (his famous “fly-bottle” analogy). I want to take up what I read as being Wittgenstein’s charge to create a seal between the epistemology of individual and disciplinary knowledge and knowing. Hopefully, this strategy in turn brings to performance a deeper and yet more elemental perplexity in relation to its self-making than it usually allows. Wittgenstein’s philosophy enables us to see the theatrical miniature, not simply as a reduction of the world but theater in miniature, as what it is when more tightly fitted to its own particular form and to the consequences of its own self-contesting actions. The world’s agents and agencies can then extrapolate these actions to reshape the conditions and not merely pictures of real life.

A study such as this cannot help but be appropriative, intrusive, and, in the end, somewhat embarrassed by what it attempts and why it attempts it. Wittgenstein acknowledged both the importance (in philosophy) of knowing when to stop asking questions and the difficulty in doing so. This book does not know when to stop asking questions, even to the point of asking answerless questions. I have on many occasions knowingly (and, I am sure, unknowingly) wrested Wittgenstein’s intentions from him and, as others have before me, read into “the compressed and aphoristic character of these works . . . to find [my] own concerns and commitments.” I hope that in doing so I have been vigilant not to let my reimagining of contexts in which to locate and to which to apply Wittgenstein’s thought overcome the integrity of the texts themselves. However much he attempted to narrow his focus to the primacy of language as a ruling subject and to grammar as a dominant methodological scheme by which to comprehend the world as it is, Wittgenstein’s reiterations and perspectival shifts and the continuous self-contestation in his writing constitute an openness that may not have been there from the start. The reader of Wittgenstein is invited into the work and made complicit in its devising and its devices, as the spectator is with Leonard Shelby’s mis/remembered incapacity, his inability to do what needs/needed to be done.

Wittgenstein’s notion of incapacity has to do less with ineffability than with impossibility, and this impossibility is discussed within the confines of the ordinary through the vehicle of language as both curator and creator, stager and obscurer of the world that each of us comes to in our own time in our own way. His discussion of limits and of language-games aligns well if inexacty with the idea of a stage, its frame and conventions, its spatio-temporal overlays of meaning and the propensity for hiddenness but also with the impossibility of showing more than we know. Wittgenstein’s philosophy has an arc to it, like a good story or play, but there are no discretely resolved acts, nor even a final resolution. He is a sort of monologist, whose speech (in which he puts great stock) reveals his impatience with the incomprehensible speaker/uncomprehending audience, with the “play of meanings
between speakers” in his writing and what they “broadly” confess (“‘confession’ deriving from cum + fāteor, ‘an act of speech that seeks its completion in another’s acknowledgment’ ”). Although, as James Wetzel reminds us, “Wittgenstein was well-known for the severity of his self-judgments and his compulsive need to confess his shortcomings to friends and acquaintances,” Wittgenstein famously stated that if he wrote a book “the world as I found it,” he would have to leave himself (i.e., the “I”) out (TLP §5.631). It is, however, unclear from this passage whether Wittgenstein wants the reader to assume that the conditional book’s title or even the idea for the book was assigned to him or else freely chosen. Would he want to write this book, and what would make him think that he does? Would he give himself no choice but to write this book, and would this “no choice” signal a performance behavior?

I had no choice but to write this book, to embrace this Wittgensteinian aporia of real or simulated doubt. Lee Braver has stated that mental life only occupies Wittgenstein “when something has knocked us out of alignment.” This is, in fact, what has happened to me, so that “interpretation does not come to an end” (RFM §342) but instead enters the dreaded “Interpretation Aporia” and the im/possibility of infinite regress. Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), which figures prominently in my narrative and (self-)critique, manifests what interpretation is in place of what things manifestly are. It is, as well, a picture-making complaint, which aligns it with art and the poetic philosophy to which Wittgenstein aspired and sometimes (e.g., his early picture theory of language/meaning) disowned. Philosophers generally agree that there is an early and a later Wittgenstein, a fact that though acknowledged in this book does not affect its structure. The picture theory that so informs Wittgenstein’s early work is introduced in this book’s first chapter and then revisited in its final chapter.

Although an OCD mind created this book, it does not take one to read it. That being said, it might help to know how the book works. The idea of the first chapter is to give the reader the feel prior to the exegesis of what this work, after Wittgenstein’s example, is doing. It instructs the reader to follow the routes that are laid out in the process of attempting to answer what appear to be abstract or impossible questions (e.g., “Is Oedipus a boiling pot?”), to consider how sentence structure is thought-structure in the process of checking (on) itself—a language of incapacity. Initially, my somewhat fluid thought process plants some of Wittgenstein’s mental stakes in the groundless ground of incapacity’s meaning un/making, constituting a kind of anecdotal survey of what the body of the book contends (with) and portends. I believe it is necessary to embody for the reader not just what is being said but what is happening in the text. My aim is not only to construct Wittgenstein for the reader but to construct the reader that Wittgenstein may have in mind. And so, I offer a series of self-afflicting philosophical propositions that illustrate both agon and agony. The reader’s presence in this book is an articulation of
Wittgenstein’s recurring question, “Can we experience another’s pain?” The performance of pain behavior as a form of othering, a show that is in fact a “tell,” begins to close in on the book’s central argument that pain behavior is in fact a form of performance behavior. Furthermore, structured performance in the representational arts, particularly theater, rises to the level of articulated disability as a mode of and motive for incapacity’s expression.

The succeeding chapters mostly present case studies of artists whose own anxiety (or that of their works) is in dialogue with the book’s central strain. Acknowledgment, a theme in chapter 1, advances to anatomization as a technique in chapter 2, wherein the figures and figurative wholes of chapter 1 are treated as (body) parts that must be looked at and read more closely—swollen-footed Oedipus’s physical disappearance at Colonus sets up Kaspar’s hand’s appearance through a stage curtain and a hand made figurative in Steve Martin’s stand-up comedy act. Oedipus’s wounded feet return in the person of stand-up comics’ cold feet and a pair of severed feet in Peter Chelsom’s film Funny Bones. The prop arrow Steve Martin wears through his head tics over in my mind to a ubiquitous arrow design in a Gombrowicz novella in order to elucidate Wittgenstein’s and my own tangle of meaning. And so on.

Chapter 3 speaks to the theme of imaginability, with which Wittgenstein, the OCD mind, and this book struggle. The obsessive-compulsive’s catastrophic intuition enacts the need for control resulting in the manufacture of problematic fictions that are all resolved without resolution. The chapter examines fictional characters whose pursuit of an invented life-logic leads them beyond their limits, even as these limits are reinscribed in their acts of transgression. The limit casts a catastrophic shadow, and nonsense (the so-called nothing out of which Wittgenstein makes something) is the sentence’s catastrophic sign. Language breaking down under questioning through which it acquits itself by confessing its own illogic is a recurring theme and practice in Wittgenstein and in this book. OCD, in this chapter (and again in chapters 6 and 7), is presented as (a) criminal dis-ease—not so furtive as to want not to be caught, to be found out, but in fact wanting to confess to a crime that it intuits it has committed or is in the act of committing. This intrusive thought intensifies as the book proceeds. Furthermore, the lying that the OCD mind does to itself, in this chapter and its examples, uncomfortably coincides with what an actor does, that is, knowingly lie as his theatrical condition demands. This is just one of the ways in which the actor is seen as being “wounded” in this text. Performance may make a show of incapacity, but it is not a victimless crime.

Chapter 4 considers the not-knowingness of incapacity. Picture gives way to scene, where stage directions model the space of not-knowing that performance helps make disappear. A certain scenic single-mindedness that redoubles representation, a version of Cavell’s inordinate knowledge performs a Wittgensteinian relation to surface over depth-seeing. Reading and
color, action and gesture (recalling the hand)-troubled perception, constitute figures of play in what Wittgenstein calls a language-game that duplicates life’s parameters so as to go unnoticed. I regard this as a form of overwriting, whose effect is a post-Cartesian transparency, a see-through thought space (what thinking looks like), a Wittgensteinian thought-syntactical theater.

In chapter 5 I demonstrate ways in which Wittgenstein’s idea of the language-game can be turned. Artists like Handke, Haneke, Foreman, and Wellman game representation and spectatorship by presenting language as a dissolvent of logical form, a practice that is at once painful and therapeutic, and that brings to mind Wittgenstein’s “seeing as” and Cartesian radical doubt. Chapter 6 more anecdotally hunts the substantive mind, apart from ego, devoid of solipsistic display and incapacity. But insomniac and agoraphobic self-delusion and self-confession (in myself and in both fictional and factual surrogates) block (i.e., obscure and direct) my path. Solipsism (derived from radical doubt), it turns out, is OCD’s way of spinning a yarn of supposedly some other limit-condition. I pursue future versions of myself (my son, my agoraphobic neighbor) and of posthumous people (e.g., The Third Man’s Harry Lime) into the underground tunnels and maze-like anxiety of OCD’s thought thinking itself in the form of a thing-like mental state. Catastrophic numbers obsession circles back into view in scenarios of insomnia and sleep-walking (in Scorsese, Kubrick, and von Trier), (re)enacting the nostalgic spatiotemporal paranoia of the fictional closed system of thought (the OCD metatext). Self-incriminating fictions, murderers, and murderers of sleep are piling up and begin to follow me home. OCD is an illogical, non-normative condition that only pays lip service to what morality says or the law allows. Generally, OCD acknowledges ritual itself, and only ritual, as a real system of belief, the life-code, and practice teaches you over and over again that even ritual cannot be trusted. OCD looks fearfully at the world in terms of consequences in the absence of truth and of guilt in the absence of ethics. Because there is no good that worry cannot erode and no end to self-incrimination, OCD takes absolute measures, experiencing the world with a violent intensity of thought that casts the thinker in the darkest possible light that fantasy allows. This is why murder and murderers fascinate the OCD mind. Murder constitutes the perfect limit-condition, the aporia of the thinker, his thought-action and his victim, the thought-object. More than having consequences, murder is absolutely consequential; with the exception of psychopaths or sociopaths, the mind cannot get past murder, and this inability to get past something that it sees as being terrible is a point of identification for OCD.

Chapter 7 analyzes so-called criminal masterminds in Mamet and Hitchcock as OCD surrogates conning systems and classifications of thought, in the process revealing language’s nihilistic potential for self-undoing. This in turn compels revaluation of people and things, names, numbers, and signs, all underwritten by the word/concept “nothing,” to which any consideration of Wittgenstein and OCD is compelled to return. So too the gambler’s lingo
(and the psychiatrist’s perspicuous reading) of “the tell” that speaks over the mind’s self-censoring and, in the case of OCD, does so “to great ‘affect’.” Wittgenstein is invited in to study word-objects as evidence of error, a sign that an ulterior logic is working itself out, often with the unwelcome participation of contingency through which doubt again enters the picture.

Chapter 8 explores the not-knowingness of the idiot persona of Jerry Lewis. This phobic chapter (especially regarding miscommunication) makes the reader more aware of what it is like to be inside the picture, in which the medium (television, film, stage, philosophy, OCD) conditions psychosomatic problems and message-reception. The embarrassment of performance behavior provokes ever more ludicrously illogical responses to the world of objects that hide themselves in turn, as if they were embarrassed, and the object analogies that take their place. I consider the stage reduced to a Wittgensteinian spartan state of being and performance (i.e., to its stage directions). Blocking presents as the visible lag that occurs in the thought process between giving and receiving of image and information, opening a gap in understanding bridged by personal interpretation. The mental object that is unknowingly identical with itself and its phenomenological dis-ease is staging’s OCD.

Chapter 9 asks whether it is possible to be outside the picture, to be homeless. I present a series of homeless men and women (in Ford, Chekhov, and Handke) whose un/acknowledged condition articulates Wittgenstein’s proposition, “I don’t know my way about,” as well as this book’s compulsion to advance answers to questions that cannot be properly asked outside the limits of its own condition (i.e., from inside the picture). Real and imagined body parts reconfigure around the theme of anxiety as a homeless wandering of the mental object that cannot be made to disappear.

After numerous examples of how the sentence (taught him by his Prompters) “I want to be a person like somebody else was once” was used as a form of address to others, to objects, to the world at large, to and as an expression of himself, Handke’s Kaspar finally states, “I wanted to know . . . what it actually means.” This is what my book hopes to achieve—a way through ordinary and extraordinary misunderstanding. “What is your aim in philosophy?” Wittgenstein asked and then answered, “To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle” (PI §309). I have returned to Wittgenstein’s therapeutic philosophy to escape my own fly-bottle, the enthrallment of incapacity as a necessary, essential, redundant (obsessive-compulsive), and dissociative performance behavior. Or is all of this, even my misunderstanding, really only an act?

Acting results from the marriage of two ghosts, the unseen metaphorical “as” and the unvoiced conditional “as if,” as in the statement, “He acts as if he did not expect to find himself on a stage.” This stage direction introduces the play Skylight (1979), one of Nicholas Mosley’s three “Plays for Not Acting” (collectively titled Catastrophe Practice). The stage direction partners with the following epigraph:
To act is to do and to pretend. What are we doing that is not pretending when we know that we are acting?33

What better place to begin than with an impossible question?