

*Ontologies of Lack and Excess in the Lyrical Poetics of Mark Strand and Rainer Maria Rilke*  
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“We are gorged with meaning and it is killing us.” Jean Baudrillard answers the Modernist problematic—that of meaninglessness—with another, no less extreme: man is equally overcome, equally helpless, before excess as he is before nothingness. The lamentation of the late nineteenth to twentieth century is the void, a life of meaninglessness with neither “hope nor help for pain.” Today, our own elegy, in a world overwrought with faces, screens, everywhere information, is that of “too much,” as Nietzsche perhaps anachronistically coins it centuries before. The contemporary predicament (both of excess and the inability to communicate this state) is one that plagues twenty-first century poetics, as seen in the work of Mark Strand, just as lack plagues earlier verse, as is evident in Rainer Maria Rilke. But still, in the very avowal of excess is that of lack, and vice versa. The paradox of “oneness” and “separation” is at the heart of most images employed. When one speaks of the void, so too one speaks of the all-encompassing; and lacking the words to express one’s state feels strangely akin to an insurmountable excess of words. My claim, however, is not that lack and excess themselves are analogous entities, but that the subject’s phenomenological experience of both is quite similar, as is the discourse (the different modes and rhetoric) employed to discuss them in lyrical poetry. Or, as Romanian philosopher, E.M. Cioran states, “life breeds both plenitude and lack, exuberance and depression” (90). Both polarities are present in Strand and Rilke, and inevitably conjure the same sense of aposiopesis, a literal speechlessness rendering not only silence but existential paralysis. And here we see how, for the subject (reader and speaker alike), there is a subliminal similarity in ontologies of lack and excess: the experience of excessive stimuli is not unlike that of nothingness. One is either in awe of the world’s vast excesses or entirely alone, cast aside.

Rainer Maria Rilke, one of the most largely noted German-language poets of the twentieth century, writes verse which is both intensely lyrical and visceral. Rilke often employs the trope of a single image which is rendered in detail, given some “transcendent” or attached significance, only to be later brought to question or shattered entirely. In this sense, his conceit parallels the fundamental problem of the twentieth century: the quest for meaning which inevitably, and always, ends in nothingness, and thus, prolonged anxiety – what Freud calls “lack.” For most twentieth century poetics, this plea is set against the backdrop of warfare and suffering. Still, unlike Modernist poets such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, Rilke chooses not to focus overtly on the crises (the “waste land”) but instead subverts these sorrows in the lyrical line itself. The recognition of lack is everywhere—from “the falling stars,” “the larks,” “landscapes,” and “churchyards,”—and is even more startling because of each disavowed motif. The image functions only as avoidance: it is brought to unprecedented heights and discarded, in its precarity, only ever a reminder of its failure to fit the signified meaning.

In Rilke’s “You Who Never Arrived,” the speaker fixes on the ideal beloved, the “amorous Other” of whom he has not yet met, and decidedly never will meet. He states, “you the beloved / lost in advance, you the never-arrived, / I don’t know what songs you like most” (87). Rilke’s use of second person, singular “you,” startles as polyseme, for it is simultaneously the most intimate of declarations and the most general. “You” is both the loved subject—the one we desire, most long to know—and every single face, every reader. It is not without purpose, then, that in line three the speaker conjures something quotidian, simple and expansive as a favourite song. The poem then

continues with a shift, turning the image of the beloved into something unprecedented and great, an apotheosis of sorts. Rilke writes, "all the great / images in me—the landscape experienced far off, cities and towers [...] / lands once intertwined with gods: / all mount up in me to signify / you, who forever eludes me" (87). This turn is crucial for two reasons: first, unlike the poem's most popular interpretation (an ode to woo an absent love), the beloved becomes something other than merely "singular other," but instead every "other," every-thing unattained or gone unmet—and in this we see Lacan's theory of the *constitutive lack*; second, the use of landscape to render a lack marks the trope of *intimate immensity* Gaston Bachelard speaks of in *Poetics of Space*. The landscape is that which personifies the excessive and vast, yet also embodies emptiness: the void that is, at once, all and nothing.

Explicating on the landscape as poetic image, Bachelard states:

If we could analyze impressions and images of immensity, or what immensity contributes to an image, we should soon enter into a region of the purest sort of phenomenology: a phenomenology without phenomenal; or, stated less paradoxically, one that, in order to know the productive flow of images, need not wait for the phenomena of the imagination to take form and become stabilized in the completed image. In other words, since immense is not an object, a phenomenology of immense would refer us directly to our imagining consciousness. In analyzing images of immensity, we should realize within ourselves the pure being of pure imagination. It then becomes clear that works of art are the by-products of this existentialism of the imagining being. In this direction of daydreams of immensity, the real product is consciousness of enlargement. We fall that we have been promoted to the dignity of the admiring being (212).

In this sense, Rilke's "beloved" is no more than the speaker's day dream; the "you" referred to is not some other self, but mere anamorphosis of the projected "I." Thus, every image conjured, whether the landscape, cities, or towers, reflects not the other, but the self. This seeing of the self in all things (rather than more accurately seeing the other in ourselves) is precisely why Jacques Derrida states in *Points* that "all love is narcissistic." Or rather, "[that] without a movement of narcissistic reappropriation the relation to the other would be absolutely destroyed." Essentially, every poetic speaker—and reader, who is always, through suspended disbelief, situated as speaker—becomes the simultaneous subject and object of the poem. And this puts the "I" at a place of ceaseless slippage: over the other, over the self, and the reification of the self into the "thing." Or, as Lacan states in *Some Reflections of the Ego*: "[T]here are two kinds of language: in one [one] says 'I am beating the dog' and in another 'There is a beating of the dog by me'. But, be it noted, the [speaker], whether he appears in the sentence as the subject of the verb or as qualifying it, in either case asserts himself as an object, involved in a relationship of some sort." Simply put, the act of speaking is always one of hypostatization and objectification. Rilke continues:

Ah, you are the gardens!  
With such hope I  
watched them! An open window  
in the country house—, and you almost  
stepped out pensively to meet me. I found streets,—  
you had just walked down them,  
and sometimes in the merchants' shops the mirrors

were still reeling from you and gave back with a start  
my too-sudden image. — Who knows if the same  
bird did not ring through both of us  
yesterday, alone, at evening? (13-23)

This last stanza depicts the speaker walking down a street while figuratively advancing toward, and away, from the beloved. He synecdochically declares that the loved one *is* the gardens; he imagines her in a country window (another image of expansion), only to see his own reflection there; and it is the same for the mirrors of merchants' shops, in which he sees only himself, weighted and hazy, the image of another lacking. The embodiment of separation is figured through the *mirror stage*, the precarious distance of the "Real" and "imaginary;" or rather, it is not the girl our speaker searches for in his reflection, but a version of his own self which would "remind" in a truer sense, rather than through empty mimesis. In the last line of the poem, ("who knows if the same bird did not ring through both of us / yesterday, alone, at evening?") the *constitutive lack* is rendered: the speaker finds himself alone, despite any envisioned sense of connection (through bird, mirror, or garden). Stranger still, if the "you" to which he speaks is both another—the beloved—and the self, he finds himself both without other and, uncannily, "outside" himself. Here lack stems from an inability to connect or be "one" with another, but also an inability to ever be a unified entity, to find "one's self" or "oneself," whether in mirror or in writing, in the attempt at communication writing conveys: *jouissance*. If this poem, read obviously, is a quest for the ideal other (*objet petit a*), the "dream girl," and dreams are no more than extensions of projected ego, what our speaker looks for all along is not something outside, but rather something inside, which is equally elusive and unattainable. Essentially, as John D. Caputo states in *For the Love of the Things Themselves*: "the (loved) other, *l'autre* (aimé) must remain other, must be kept safe as other, and we must lay down our arms (*rendre les armes*) and surrender, and by sacrificing the assault of realism upon the world, to allow the thing itself to slip away - just in order to keep it safe and show it our love" (15). Hence, our relationship to the Other is always overdetermined. The beloved who never arrives, must never arrive, must only exist in the act of flight. If "it" were caught (which is, of course, an impossibility), it would, instantaneously and on the spot, cease to be the "ideal Other," for the ideal can only be that which is not known, that which exists liminally, on the edge of thought. In other words, lack is no more than the impossibility of the thing itself.

Conversely, Mark Strand, a twenty-first century poet, uses the lyrical line to render its excesses rather than lack. Not unlike Rilke, Strand employs a single descriptive image which functions throughout the poem's entirety; Strand, however, uses imagery, whether it be "a fire" or "snowfall," as multiplicitous—exhausting every possible association, significance, and place. The object is thus similarly desensitized not from lack of meaning but "too much." While we start with the singular, we end with manifold; what is initially a book or page becomes, quite literally, "the story of our lives." This conceit is indicative of the contemporary lament of which Baudrillard spoke. The problem is no longer meaninglessness but filtration, no longer no-"thing" but choosing which "thing." We see this quite simply in Strand's common conceit of listing: the answer or meaning of the poem (if there need be one), is never *this* or *that*, but always both and neither.

In the first stanza of "The Story of Our Lives," Strand writes, "we are reading the story of our lives / which takes place in a room. / The room looks out on a street [...] / The trees are heavy with leaves, / the parked cars never move. / We keep turning the pages" (Strand 1-7). Already we can see the use of catalogue form; we are being taken on a journey, the unfolding of which is both the poem itself, and the reading of it. It is thus simultaneously metanarrative (the omniscient

experience of speaker) and focused, interiorized "we." He continues, "it is almost as if the room were the world. / We sit [on] the couch, / reading about the couch. / We say it is ideal. / It is ideal" (18-22). Elaborating on J.L. Austin's *How to do things with words*, notice the way the performative utterance blurs into, and becomes, the constative; the reading of the poem becomes the poem just as the recognition of the ideal becomes the ideal. And is this not the constant role of language in its excesses? To state is not really "to be," but the problem lies not in this rift so much as in the infinite options, opportunities, and types of "being;" since things can only exist in relationships of difference (a couch is a couch because it is not a chair) the choice is one of ceaseless deferral. The closest our speaker can come is the epistemological presupposition that that which is named "ideal," is indeed, just this. Still, his position—as arbiter of reality for the poem—is one of insecurity; otherwise, the line would not be "it is almost as if the room were the world," and instead "the room is the world" (18).

As the poem continues, we become increasingly confused with dictated reality (the reality of the speaker) and the "Reality" (of the poem). Unlike Rilke's trope of the search for something, Strand offers a stacking of things, and perhaps more extremely, an attempt to evade this process. Whereas Rilke's speaker is paralyzed by the "nothing that is," Strand's faces his own kind of determinism: the paralysis of choice, and the illusion of fatality that stems from this very state. Or, as Strand writes, "I grow into my death. / My life is small, / and getting smaller. The world is green. / Nothing is all." The image of the void, that which is all and nothing, resurfaces: that, in the spaces and gaps, more exists than in words themselves, is a crucial aspect of the poem's unfolding. For every  $x$ , it is not the case that  $x$  exists. Peter Schwenger explicates this notion in his book *On Liminal Literature*. He states:

No doubt, we have always known that reading takes place as much in the spaces between words as it does by means of the words themselves. [The] words actually appear, if only momentarily, as the mechanical constructions they always were, each with its own assigned meanings. And the spaces between reveal themselves not really as "spaces" at all, but areas teeming with movement: images, narrative fragments, drafts of meaning that can, if highly charged enough, become drifts, seducing the reader away from a 'responsible' reading of the text ( Schwenger 49).

In this sense, the poem (in fact, all written language) functions as an echo. It is excessive because of all that exists outside it: the connotations, subliminal connections, subtle reverberations of similar words ("spaces" or "faces," "gaps" or "paths"), in the same way that it is always lacking in its inability to correspond. The signifier is not, and never will be, the signified, but both can remind, with movement toward other things, other words and images. Hence, the echo of the text. And this is why Edmund Jabès suggests "we must not think that absence lacks images. Without them we could not conceive of absence." Paradoxically, then, even in that which is most conceivably lacking—absence itself—there is still a sense of "too much."

Our speaker continues, "I lean back and watch you grow older without me. / Sunlight falls on your silver hair. / The rugs, the furniture, seem almost imaginary now. / *She continued to read. / She seemed to consider his absence / of no special importance, / as someone on a perfect day will consider / the weather a failure / because it did not change his mind*" (50-7). Here we see conversely, how even in the excess of a poem unfolding and overflowing into life, there still remains a lack: between both the poem's subjects (the two lovers) and the poem's reader and speaker. One remarks on the isolation of growing old alone, or of being left behind by the text, of its continuation without us. Even the

absence is no longer of "special importance," which echoes the paradox of the reading act; reading is an inherently solitary act (Blanchot) but also the most uniting, wherein the reader becomes the speaker, becomes the text—so that when Strand's speaker considers his partner, ("I looked at [her] face / and I read the eyes, the nose, the mouth") there is a literal reading of the body—a transferring of the traces of language unto flesh. In the attempt to decipher the text (and the body) there is a pleasure and a tension. "The Story of Our Lives" itself is an "embodiment" of tension, mainly in its split between being what Roland Barthes calls a *writerly* or *readerly* text. Is a poem which narrates itself leaving any room for the narrative affect of its reader? Is, perhaps, this conceit an attempt to give the reader more freedom: to turn the reader into the poem? We inevitably face the same problem as the speaker. The "we" in line one ("We are reading the story of our lives") no longer functions solely as speaker's voice, but becomes our own. Indeed, we are reading the story of our lives. We are incapable of doing anything but, given we are interpolated into the very line which states "we are reading" while, of course, we read. Thus, Strand ends the poem:

*They sat beside each other on the couch.  
They were the copies, the tired phantoms  
of something they had been before.  
The attitudes they took were jaded.  
They stared into the book  
and were horrified by their innocence,  
their reluctance to give up.  
They sat beside each other on the couch.  
They were determined to accept the truth.  
Whatever it was they would accept it.  
The book would have to be written  
and would have to be read.  
They are the book and they are  
nothing else (85).*

This last stanza is crucial for two reasons: first, it quite literally "reflects" (not unlike Rilke's poem) the notion of mimesis, a copy of some presupposed original; second, there is a blurring, and thus a distortion, of the text's designated writer and audience (the book would have to be written, indeed, and would have to be read). As Strand states, "it was words that created divisions in the first place, / that created loneliness" (84). Both aspects—mimesis and authorship—fall back on divisions and spaces: the space between two given fields, the spaces in which things belong and defer, create and copy. The lyrical line, through image and diction, becomes a landscape. Thus, through the anxiety of "too much," of an excess of choices, Strand creates the ultimate escape: a poem dictating every action, every possible choice. There is, quite literally, nothing outside of the text.

This concept of a "poetics of landscape" is rendered quite succinctly in Rainer Maria Rilke's poem, "Again and Again:"

*Again and again, even though we know love's landscape  
and the little churchyard with its lamenting names  
and the terrible reticent gorge in which the others  
end: again and again the two of us go out together  
under the ancient trees, lay ourselves down again and again  
among the flowers, facing opposite the sky (107).*

This piece, though short, coalesces motifs of death, separation, and yet, a quiet sense of hopefulness. The poem takes place between two subjects (excluding the reader), and the second subject—the one spoken to—exists only in absence, in the gaps. Thus, our speaker literally "speaks" for the other: she, existing only through negation. Here, the poem enacts movement and perspective. It begins with shifting sense of space, starting in "love's landscape" and moving toward the "little churchyard; next we shift to the "reticent gorge, "ancient trees," and, finally, the field where they "lay down [together] among the flowers." For a poem of merely six lines, a poem which echoes a tone of both peacefulness and silence, there is in fact a large amount of action, a busyness which fails to correspond to its diction and voice. This separation of form and content parallels a movement towards, and away from, the other. Though it unfolds only with the use of a collective "we," and thus, a sense of connectedness, it speaks only of loss: literally through death, with the "reticent gorge" of "the others" and the "lamenting names." The voice is always "two," furthered with the double-play of "again and again," but still, the theme is that of "oneness." In lying down with flowers, the speaker is, quite literally, practicing for dying, or rather, mimicking death, *miming* death (here, loss too becomes mimesis). Derrida states in *Dissemination*, "[The] Mime does not read his role; he is also read by it. Or at least he is both read and reading, written and writing; between the two, in the suspense of the hymen, at once screen and mirror" (193). The poem is not read by us but instead *reads us*, just as thought thinks in us and language speaks us. Death and the text, in this sense, both function as intercessor – between words, worlds, and between self and other.

We do not yet know of the place in which the others end—we can only mime, and pretend. Or as Derrida questions, "Can I die?," "Is my death possible?" He poses this, perhaps unintentionally, in relation to another question: the dreamer's possibility of recalling, even analyzing, a dream without waking. Derrida claims that the philosopher's answer to this possibility will always be no, since "awakening" remains the core aim of their study. Poets will say yes, this singularity is possible: one can simultaneously dream and wake, recall and remain inundated in the dream itself. His question then ("Is my death possible?") is already answered here. For the philosopher, no. The dying subject can only be cognizant of that moment preceding death and never death itself. So for the "I" death is impossible; it is impossible to see a moment, as I, without the I. For the poets, however, this awareness, on the brink of self and non-self, this singularity, might be—even for the briefest of moments—an impossible possibility. Within this context, Derrida's question changes the poetics of "Again and Again" entirely; the speaker is not merely practicing for death but, perhaps, in a way already experiencing it. Similarly, Maurice Blanchot states in *The Space of Literature*:

When I am alone, the light of day is only the loss of a dwelling place. It is intimacy with the outside which has no location and affords no rest. Coming here makes the one who comes belong to dispersal, to the fissure where the exterior is the intrusion that stifles, but is also nakedness, the chill of the enclosure that leaves one utterly exposed. Here the only space is its vertiginous separation. Here fascination reigns (111).

Thus, there is a double fascination, the allure of the Other and the end. As Blanchot explicates, the light of day is the loss of a dwelling place, which, in Rilke's poem is quite clearly the landscape of love and the graveyard; perhaps the two are one and the same. Still, the ultimate "light of day" is signified in sky, the place which our subjects are always, and inevitably, opposite (and opposing): that place of excess in its most extreme, which is also, like death, for us but a distance.

So too is Blanchot's quote relevant to Mark Strand's poem "The Coming of Light." Also brief and lyrical, the speaker states:

Even this late it happens:  
the coming of love, the coming of light.  
You wake and the candles are lit as if by themselves,  
stars gather, dreams pour into your pillows,  
sending up warm bouquets of air.  
Even this late the bones of the body shine  
and tomorrow's dust flares into breath (137).

First, this piece seems little more than *disjecta membra*, a sort of euphoric outpouring of someone close to a great darkening, to life's closing. It is dream-like: the muddled pieces of a sleep image, something hypnagogic. The first line ("even this late it happens") stresses the ambiguity of "it." Of what does the poem speak? Transcendence? Hope? Perhaps this "it" is the "*Es*" Freud commonly uses, where I instead gives way to "it," and the ego is lost in something other. The light here plays off Blanchot's suggestion of loss, as we also saw in the Rilke poem. Still, there is a paradoxical shift, where light becomes that which is coming, that which is always coming: a "being-toward-death." Read this way, the poem becomes a preparation of sorts, not unlike "Again and Again:" a miming act, readying oneself for death. The speaker is lost in both the excess of that which is gathering, a time with no more "tomorrow," and the lack of this same tomorrow. We see this in the catachresis of dust and breath. The symbol for loss, that which is old and unused, is closely tied to that which most portrays the living: the dust of breath, from dust to breath, or, moreover, breath to dust. Both "Again and Again" and "The Coming of Light" evoke the same condition, the same overall voice, but one fixates on sorrow, another hope. Either way, the speaker is rendered silent by that which awaits, which is why both poems themselves enact a sort of silence and solitude. Or, as Jean Genet posits, "solitude does not signify an unhappy state but rather profound incommunicability, yet a more or less somber knowledge of an unassailable singularity." So too are the states of nothingness and excess not inherently unhappy, but incommunicable; they are beyond speech yet doomed to an attempt at rendering.

This blurring of lack and excess—a paradoxical desire for complete solitude and complete connection—reaches its culmination in Rilke's poem titled "Girl's Lament." In the first stanza, our speaker muses: "in the years when we were / all children, this inclining to be alone so much was gentle; / and one had one's faction, / one's near, one's far-off place, / a path, an animal, a picture" (1-5). The speaker embodies the self apart and melancholy: notice the focus on "one," that which is singular and interiorized. Though she remarks that the inkling to be alone was gentle when young, we infer that this desire has become something less controllable, more restless with age. Strangely, the speaker experiences her necessary isolation in both the "far-off" places and the "near;" images of "animal" and "picture." Once again, we see the hypnagogic: images, sounds, language that seems to come up almost as if without control or relation to their viewer, as if they are indeed someone else's sight, another's vision. That, for the speaker, childhood symbolizes a purer sense of contentment, once again echoes Lacan's theory of *constitutive lack*, though the derivation of her contentment stems from a sense of aloneness here, rather than oneness. She continues: "still I imagined that life / would always keep providing / for one to dwell on things within, / Am I within myself not in what's greatest?" (8-11) In this stanza the tension of inner and outer reaches its apogee, in what Slavoj Žižek calls the ultimate parallax: "This absolute gap between the experience of encountering somebody and the 'nothing behind' of the open skull." This gap enacts the strangeness of realizing

that that which is most commonly noted as “naturalized” or “true” is also that which is most unknown: the entity of our own brain itself, rather than its imagined workings, is something we will never, can never see. So when our speaker asks, “Am I within myself,” the question can be taken quite literally. Where do “I”—the imagined, whole idea of “I”—exist? Within? Without? Or perhaps the experience of being “within” an outside?

Similarly, the poem reaches its apex in the final stanza, wherein the speaker laments her condition with a death wish of sorts:

Suddenly I'm as if cast out,  
and this solitude surrounds me  
as something vast and unbounded,  
when my feeling, standing on the hills  
of my breasts, cries out for wings  
or for an end (14-9).

Here the rhetoric employed to conjure solitude is “something vast and unbounded.” Ironically, these terms are typically associated, once again, with *immense intimacy* and a sense of completion rather than isolation. Our speaker is alienated by that which should connect, in the same way that waters unite the very continents they divide. The body (literally the breast) is synecdochically figured as a landscape—the same hills the self is standing on. Likewise, “feeling” (“when my feeling”) is used to *embody* the entity of “I,” for it is feeling itself, standing on the hills, that cries out “for wings” or “an end,” and not the girl herself. We are left only with questions: Does the girl lament her solitude or yearn for more? Does she desire escape and movement or safety, a home? Through the failure of the poem’s diction to coincide with its content, we once again experience a sense of dissolution, where there is only obscurity, only the reader as apart and “cast out” as the girl.

This same sense of haziness and isolation is achieved in Mark Strand’s meditative poem, “Black Sea.” He writes:

One clear night while the others slept, I climbed  
the stairs to the roof of the house and under a sky  
strewn with stars I gazed at the sea, at the spread of it,  
[...] I stood in the long,  
whispering night, waiting for something, a sign, the approach  
of a distant light, and I imagined you coming closer (1-7).

The poem begins with the speaker alone, climbing the roof and looking toward a great distance, split between the vastness of sky and sea. Already, again, we see the crossing of metaphors; that which connects and that which divides, ultimately signified in the same image. We also experience echoes of the intertextual, of a man looking out on the water waiting for the “approach of a distant light,” not unlike the speaker of “Dover Beach,” or Jay Gatsby by the harbor, looking toward “the green light, the orgasmic future that year by year recedes before us, [eludes] us” (113). But then, like *Gatsby* too, the light becomes symbolic not of mere distance but a girl, the desired Other. The speaker states, “the dark waves of your hair mingling with the sea, / and the dark became desire, and desire the arriving light. / The nearness, the momentary warmth of you as I stood / on that lonely height watching the slow swells of the sea / break on the shore and turn briefly into glass and disappear” (Strand 8-12). These lines render both the *oceanic feeling* and a sense of lack. The girl, pictured through



oceanic imagery, becomes a source of complete and perfect connection; hence, the use of diction such as “nearness” and “warmth” are all employed to show a sense of wholeness, perhaps the precursory wholeness of the womb and youth, as well as an almost mythical transcendence. Still, because the girl is just an image, a projection of the self (and literally nothing more than “dark waves” of hair, “momentary warmth”), the speaker experiences an extreme sense of isolation not unlike the speaker in Rilke’s “Lament.” The poem ends with: “why did I believe you would come out of nowhere? Why with all / that the world offers would you come only because I was here?” (13-14) Finally, we see it is excess as much as lack that inspires our speaker’s sorrow. It is both the distance of the girl and “all that the world offers.” And like “Lament,” this poem too ends only with a question.

Here we see the blurring of ontologies: lack and excess, despair and love, solitude and unity. We, as readers, must tease out the warring significations between false binaries, which are often rendered as a poetics of opposition, in order to find instead the way these signifiers (lack and excess, separate and together) interact and become the other—each already containing within themselves their supposed opposite. The discourse of “oneness” (such as euphoria, love, or transcendence) is nearly analogous to that of disconnect (be it constitutive lack or mirror stage); and the discourse of excess is seemingly analogous to that of lack. This is true for the poetics of both Rilke and Strand—wherein the phenomenological experience of joys and sorrows blend together and become indistinguishable in the rendering. The self apart, cast aside and entirely alone, is experienced no differently than the self overwhelmed, amidst a sea of faces, voices, and choices. When one has no words to describe a feeling, or when one has “too many,” the same feelings of paralysis and inability are evoked. Thus, thinking of excess and thinking of lack requires the same vocabulary, and, inevitably, the same tautology.

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