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PROFANE ILLUMINATION, GENRE, AND THE INTEGRATIVE STUDY OF LITERATURE

by

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Abstract: In addition to questioning and crossing disciplinary boundaries, Integrative Studies scholars need to question and cross genre boundaries, reaching toward innovation in presentation as well as methodology. Scholarship, like creative writing, often grows out of a personal quest for knowledge and meaning; yet the two paths of inquiry often diverge rather than take advantage of the full spectrum of approaches that include narrative, speculation, and personal voice and the more widely accepted strategies of analysis and experimentation. The arguments for integration are worth exploring at greater depth. A consideration of Walter Benjamin's insights into the nature of thinking and Carl Jung's work on synchronicity can lead integrative scholars to imagine intellectual directions and prose forms that integrate the personal with the analytical and the critical with the creative without sacrificing creativity or scholarly rigor.

As a field, Integrative Studies has done much to advocate for integrative research design, providing definitions of interdisciplinarity that encourage scholars to frame and pursue intellectual inquiry that remains unlimited by bounds of discipline. So far, however, the field has broken little new ground in terms of enlarging possibilities for the *presentation* of integrative

scholarship. The December 2007 *AIS Newsletter* contains six definitions of interdisciplinary studies that emphasize research design and cognitive process, with almost no language to describe the kinds of creative scholarly products that might emerge from integrative research (Newell, 2007, pp. 3-4). The comments in the collective report from the 2007 AIS Conference, however, demonstrate a recognition that nontraditional methods of academic thinking may call for nontraditional methods of academic presentation. One commentator appreciated the “lyrical,” “personal,” and “non-linear” quality of Dr. Amira De la Garza’s keynote address (Bates et al., 2007, p. 6). Another commentator reacted to storyteller Odds Bodkin’s performance at the conference with “thoughts of how we might use narrative more,” considering the Bodkin “keynote” as “an invitation to consider accessing our inner storyteller . . . in our own topics” (Bates et al., 2007, p. 6). For many, the presentation of integrative scholarship may require academically atypical genres or media.

While theorists of interdisciplinarity like Giles Gunn, Julie Thompson Klein, and William Newell discuss the interplay of scholarly disciplines comprehensively, the literature of interdisciplinarity leaves the line between scholarship and “creative writing” relatively untroubled. This distinction is a matter of genre, and *should* be troubled, however; for many thinkers, especially in the humanities, *genre is methodology*. Some of the most powerful interdisciplinary thinkers in Western tradition reached their insights through prose experiments that combine autobiography and storytelling with wide-ranging cognitive wandering, sometimes peppered with startling observations, but sometimes left in a state of rhetorical openness that allows the reader to enter the inquiry. Walter Benjamin’s “Hashish in Marseilles,” for instance, while offering no analytically focused statements about either hashish or Marseilles, models an aleatory cognitive methodology—for Benjamin, a blend of intense observation and inebriated contemplation—that has proven productive for cultural studies, anthropology, literature scholarship, and popular science writing by authors like Oliver Sacks, Stephen Jay Gould, Stephen Hawking, and William Gleick. When we restrict ourselves in terms of genre, we restrict our methodologies. Carl Jung, another profoundly influential thinker, generated and conveyed insights using personal as well as clinical experience, and his often eccentric-sounding writing blends story, speculation, and literary analysis with clinical experience.

In a definition of interdisciplinarity offered in his essay “Interdisciplinary Studies,” Gunn argues that interdisciplinary scholarship should be

“something more than ratcheting up the sophistication with which one explores the relations between literature and another endeavor—myth, psychology, religion, film, the visual arts—by utilizing methods appropriate to the study of each” (in Newell, 1998, p. 253). Speaking as a literature scholar, Gunn continues,

Interdisciplinarity requires, instead, an alteration of the constitutive question that generates such an inquiry.... where relational studies proceed from the question of what literature ... has to do with some other material ... or some other field ... interdisciplinary inquiries proceed from the double-sided question about how the insights or methods of some other field or structure can remodel our understanding of the nature of literature and the “literary.” (In Newell, 1998, p. 253)

For most scholars of literature, boundaries among disciplines have long been permeable. In research, if not in institutional structure, scholars pursuing literary inquiry have never hesitated to fuse the study of literature by drawing on philosophy, psychology, art history, political history, social science, and the physical sciences. Neither have they hesitated to apply critical frameworks for understanding literature to painting, film, theater, history, clothing, or popular culture. In the world of the scholarship of literature, all the world is a text, and it has been for some time.

While disciplinary boundaries may be particularly fluid for scholars of literature, and increasingly permeable for others, there remain more rigidly boundaried understandings of the sort of activity—and the kind of writing—that scholarship is. This boundary becomes visible in the phrase “creative writing,” which implies that other kinds of writing are somehow not creative, or are less creative. My purpose here is to tell stories that blur the distinction between “creative” writing and scholarship. The “insights and methods” considered appropriate to fiction and poetry can be fruitful for scholarship as well. A more capacious understanding of scholarship, as a writerly activity and a genre, produces a richer understanding of how “literature and the ‘literary’” function. In addition to asking how disciplines interrelate and methodologies overlap, we must ask, as we continue to define “integrative studies,” what kinds of literary forms—what kinds of genres—suit integrative scholarly insights.

The institutional context against which my writing life has taken shape is unusual, but the creative writing/literature scholarship divide affects many English departments, and scholars in all disciplines suffer limitations

on their creativity wherever narrower conventions and rigid expectations about genre shape what scholars write. I work in an English department that offers a Poetry major, at a college in which the Fiction Writing department and the English department are separate entities. The English department is in charge of expository writing, poetry, literature scholarship, and creative non-fiction. This institutional peculiarity makes the creative writer/scholar divide acutely noticeable. However, similar divisions of labor between “creative writers” and “literature scholars” affect many departments, and outside of English departments, typically, scholars produce work that is positioned, in generic and institutional terms, even more strictly outside the bounds of what is considered “creative.” I argue here that scholarship, as a cognitive activity and life pursuit, is not as different from “creative writing” as institutional terminology implies. If we recognized scholarship and other kinds of creative writing as close kin, we would widen our expectations about how scholars can write.

Philosophers, artists, and other kinds of thinkers have since antiquity attempted to describe what creative production is—what artists, whether they are painters, sculptors, or poets, actually do. Plato, who did draw a distinction between kinds of artists (poets would corrupt the ideal republic whereas musicians would not), thought that art was a kind of transmission—a perception and transmission of forms from the realm of the ideal. Aristotle, who is less of a transcendentalist and more of a psychologist, proposed that art, while imitating life, facilitates catharsis: Through art, we experience and purge turbulent emotions (fear, pity) in a ritual setting. Over two millennia later, social scientists would also conceive of art as a process connected with human management of consciousness and unconsciousness. Many psychoanalytic theorists, following Freud, conceive of art as a process of sublimation: The artist expresses and processes unconscious material through creative work. Anthropologists, more interested in the social dimensions of art than in its role in an individual psyche, have emphasized the ritual and social dimensions of creative processes. Michael Taussig argues in his book *Mimesis and Alterity* (1993) that artistic production serves a “magical” social power: Imitation or replication, he suggests, gives the maker “power over that which is portrayed” (p. 13). As an anthropologist, Taussig is interested in how mimesis—instantiated in statues of European peoples made by the Cuna, an indigenous people from the San Blas islands—empowers colonized peoples in their encounters with colonizers. As his title indicates, Taussig also explores how mimesis offers the maker an experience of alterity—an experience of “otherness,” a sensation of being an/other self, or being in an/

other place, or in an/other time. Taussig draws his concepts of alterity from Walter Benjamin's "On the Mimetic Faculty," in which Benjamin proposes that mimicry is "a rudiment of the powerful compulsion . . . to become and behave like something else" (1993, p. 333).

The philosophers Emmanuel Levinas and Hélène Cixous use the term "alterity" to designate a more basic subjective experience—simply the awareness and experience of the other, that which is not the self, that which is outside the self. However, Levinas and Cixous do write about the experience of alterity—the self's recognition of the existence of the other—in charged terms that locate in it a certain numinous quality associated with the religious. In contrast to the high moral seriousness of Levinas and Cixous, the concept of alterity is for Benjamin and Taussig a more playful, irreverent, even mischievous act of being—a manipulation and transcendence of ordinary consciousness that leads more to transgression or revolt than to the kinds of Judaic or feminist concepts of peace and moral virtue Levinas and Cixous imagine. These French philosophers think of alterity as immanent—a *fact* more than an *act* of being. For Taussig, following Benjamin, the allure of alterity inspires action, an effort to *become* other. Any transcendence of self suggested by alterity is, for them, utterly secular, even profane, though magical in the sense that it transforms ordinary reality into the extraordinary. For Benjamin, in fact, the exemplary practitioners of alterity were the surrealists, whose transformations of ordinary consciousness, achieved as often through intoxication as through artistic practice, he considers potentially revolutionary. Intoxication produces a "loosening of self," Benjamin suggests, and can give an "introductory lesson" to "*profane illumination*, a materialistic, anthropological inspiration" (1978, p. 179). Benjamin's idea of the profane illumination—the transformation of ordinary experience into the marvelous through perception—may be what much artistic activity, including literary activity, seeks.

If an important role of art in human life is to manipulate consciousness by achieving experiences of alterity, then literature, film, and art scholarship can be considered an extension of this process. Practicing literature, art, and film scholarship immerses the scholar in mimetic process, extending the process through study and further literary production. "The fundamental move of the mimetic faculty taking us bodily into alterity is very much the task of the storyteller," Taussig writes (p. 15). Literature scholarship, therefore, is for people who desire experiences of alterity, or who wish to extend their experience of alterity past the point where the story ends. Probably no one—besides storytellers and painters—spends more time engaged in mimesis

than scholars. Another aspect of the cognitive experience of mimesis, whether story or visual art, is the perception of pattern. The perception and production of pattern is where mimesis and alterity meet the phenomenon of what C.J. Jung called “synchronicity,” commonly called “coincidence” in everyday parlance.

The concept of synchronicity enters my thinking about interdisciplinarity because its presence spans my experience of both art and scholarship. The phenomenon of synchronicity in life—especially in the life of an artist—seems no longer remarkable, perhaps because so many artists have remarked it. The fictions of Thomas Pynchon, Vladimir Nabokov, and Italo Calvino all explore the phenomenon, as does Nabokov’s memoir. Joel Agee’s essay, “A Fury of Symbols,” documents an extraordinary eruption of synchronicity in that author’s life, following a period of intense literary activity and drug use. Nabokov suggests that the phenomenon of coincidence indicates the presence of a pattern underlying the apparent chaos of the cosmos—a kind of cautious transcendentalism. Jung attempts a scientific presentation of the phenomenon in his book *Synchronicity*. In this eccentric yet perfectly lucid book, Jung coins the term synchronicity to describe the “simultaneous occurrence of two meaningfully but not causally connected events” and “the simultaneous occurrence of a certain psychic state with one or more external events which appear as meaningful parallels to the momentary subjective state” (1973, p. 25). He gives the example of being interrupted while listening to an analysand’s dream by a tapping sound at the window. An instant after the analysand described a dream in which she was given a golden scarab, Jung opened the window to find that the source of the noise was a scarabaeid beetle, a creature named for its resemblance to a scarab (1973, p. 22). Jung’s explanation for such phenomena is simple, plausible, and in keeping with modern physics. Our conscious experience of time and space, he argues, is a mental construction organized by tools and systems of measurement; conscious conceptions of time and space, therefore, are shaped (and limited) by these systems of measurement—sequential, linear, non-simultaneous, with an understanding of space and distance as literal, material, specific, finite, measurable, knowable by common sense. For the unconscious, however, time and space are relative and nonliteral; their attributes and “knowability” can defy common sense. The unconscious mind, therefore, in Jung’s argument, is capable of perceptions unavailable to the conscious mind, because it is not limited by finite, literal, and sequential concepts of time and space. Jung, who conducted a number of experiments aimed at documenting the existence of coincidence whose “incidence

exceeds the limits of probability” (1973, p. 11), says that even attempting to speak about synchronicity strikes at the heart of our epistemological foundations in the West. Scientific paradigms offer few epistemological resources for understanding such phenomena, Jung suggests, because much scientific knowing has focused on causality, the only readily understood connecting principle between events.

The insights of modern physics had begun to permeate the wider intellectual culture around the time Jung was writing. Einstein published his special theory of relativity in 1905; Jung’s earliest work on synchronicity appeared in 1951. By now, thanks to Einstein, Schrödinger, and physicists after them, and joined by popular science writers (Gary Zukav’s *Dancing Wu Li Masters* and Fritjof Capra’s *Tao of Physics* helped make the new physics comprehensible to ordinary readers), contemporary intellectuals can easily accept the idea that the observer and context of observation affect what is observed. At least theoretically, most of us understand that space and time function more fluidly and more flexibly than common sense would suppose. Jung’s assertions about the relativity of space and time in the realm of the unconscious are consonant with these basic principles of modern physics.

[S]pace and time consist of nothing [Jung writes]. They are hypostatized concepts born of the discriminating activity of the conscious mind, and they form indispensable co-ordinates for describing the behavior of bodies in motion. ... But if space and time are only apparently properties of bodies in motion and are created by the intellectual needs of the observer, then their relativization by psychic conditions is no longer a matter for astonishment but is brought within the bounds of possibility. (1973, p. 20)

Similarly, he explains, “For the unconscious psyche space and time seem to be relative ... knowledge finds itself in a space-time continuum in which space is no longer space nor time time. If, therefore, the unconscious should develop or maintain a potential in the direction of consciousness, it is possible for parallel events to be perceived or ‘known’” (1973, p. 65). Jung then connects this understanding of space and time in the unconscious to his definition of synchronicity, writing, “Synchronicity consists of two factors: (a) An unconscious image comes into consciousness either directly ... or indirectly ... in the form of a dream, idea, or premonition; (b) An objective situation coincides with this content” (1973, p. 31). Jung tries to break down this internal process more explicitly, suggesting that “the

observer can easily be influenced by an emotional state which alters time and space by ‘contraction,’” which causes a “narrowing of consciousness and a corresponding strengthening of the unconscious. ... creating a gradient for the unconscious to flow toward the conscious. The conscious then comes under the influence of unconscious instinctual impulses and contents” (1973, p. 30). I suggest that art, making it or writing about it, tends to produce synchronicity because, as activities, making art or writing about art activates the unconscious, creating the conditions for both alterity and the fluctuations of time and space that result, according to Jung, in the phenomenon of synchronicity.

Curious though it sounds, the reported experience of numerous writers and artists, combined with my own experience of scholarship, leads me to think that aesthetic activity actually facilitates synchronicity. The following discussion provides examples of synchronicities attendant upon aesthetic engagement—one involving Leslie Marmon Silko’s novel *Almanac of the Dead*, one involving the surrealist painter Remedios Varo, and one involving my creative/scholarly interest in Varo. Jung’s theory helps us imagine how aesthetic activity may encourage proliferation of synchronicity. According to ancient and modern speculations about the connections between mimesis and alterity, art alters consciousness, changing the mental mixture of conscious and unconscious activity involved in cognition. By relaxing the grip of the conscious mind and shifting the unconscious mind into greater ascendancy, making or perceiving art can produce a sensation of alterity. For those who study art, scholarship does the same thing: It immerses the writer in a confrontation with art objects and mimetic processes, thereby extending the ritual of mimesis and, potentially, its mental effects. The scholar’s intense involvement with created objects and worlds also invites shifts in consciousness that allow the unconscious greater presence in cognitive function. Benjamin, in fact, considers thinking—the scholar’s central activity—to have narcotic properties. He writes, “the most passionate investigation of the hashish trance will not teach us half as much about thinking (which is eminently narcotic), as the profane illumination of thinking about the hashish trance. The reader, the thinker, the loiterer, the *flâneur*, are types of illuminati just as much as the opium eater, the dreamer, the ecstatic” (1978, p. 190). Cognition is the scholar’s playground, as it is the artist’s.

When the unconscious, activated through mimesis, occupies a larger role in cognitive function, it creates an expanded role in cognition for intuition, which Jung defines simply as “perception by means of subliminal contents”

(1973, p. 35). Given the possibility that mimesis and alterity empower the unconscious, which permits “contraction” of space and/or time in the mind, we should not be surprised if—around acts of mimesis and ritual—art or art criticism, we find an increased incidence of synchronicity, intuition, or even precognition and/or déjà vu. In fact, I wonder if another word needs to be invented for the proliferation of synchronicity that seems to occur around acts of writing and reading. Each of the following examples illustrate that interpenetration of life and art that storytellers like Pynchon, Calvino, Nabokov, and Agee have remarked. The following details about Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* reveal a disconcerting permeability of boundaries between writing and life outside writing.

In this epic novel, Silko enters upon a particularly sustained and self-conscious inquiry into what she calls “story-magic,” using her novel to enact what the rhetoric scholar William Covino calls the “arresting” and “generative” magic of word and story—the potential of word and story to arrest ambiguity and thereby straightjacket thought, and their potential to generate new realities that enlarge the scope of human thought and possibility (pp. 22-29). *Almanac of the Dead*, with its many stories-within-the-story, is itself a piece of magical rhetoric calculated to mobilize extra-ordinary effects of word and story. The novel functions explicitly as a kind of magical ritual described by Angus Fletcher in his seminal chapter on allegory and magic in the book *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*.¹ Silko claims that she constructed *Almanac* as “a sort of voodoo spell” (Coltelli, 1994, p. 65) and reports that she “wrote that novel to the world” as an act of healing and consolation (Arnold, p. 4). The author’s belief in the ability of literary activity to affect the world outside literature makes *Almanac* an exercise in art as magical ritual.

Silko’s magical view of language and story rests on an assumption that language and story create realities; her prescription in *Almanac* for cultural survival and spiritual renewal involves understanding how control of language and story have constituted power, excluded certain groups from power, and shaped history. *Almanac* thus unites respect for the materiality of reality with an awareness of the textuality of reality. “Books have been the focus of the struggle for the control of the Americas from the start,” Silko claims in an essay, “The great libraries of the Americas were destroyed in 1540 because the Spaniards feared the political and spiritual power of books authored by the indigenous people” (Silko, 1996, p. 165). In exploring how control of language and story contribute to European domination of indigenous people in the Americas, dramatizing how rhetorical acts can alter reality, and offering

language and story that show how to resist cultural domination at the level of the imagination, *Almanac of the Dead* is an almanac for cultural survival. The novel's rhetorical purpose enacts its author's belief that word, story, and world are not separate realms, but are intricately connected.

Silko scholars have long discussed the novels *Ceremony* and *Almanac* as dramatizations and proofs of the power of narrative to affect reality (St. Clair, 1996, pp. 151-52). They say that her novel serves to (1) "[reawaken] ... traditional gods ... and cure postcolonial malaise" (Benediktsson, 1992, p. 123); (2) to "[motivate] political, personal, and social transformations" and "inspire political metamorphoses and revolution" (Horvitz, 1998, p. 50); and (3) to "change the world" (King, 1994, p. 40). To believe that words and stories can "change the world" is to construct a cosmology in which language wields a power that is both pragmatic and miraculous. Gregory Salyer acknowledges the pragmatic aspiration of Silko's use of language and story when he summarizes how *Almanac* wields its rhetorical power: "Native Americans will take back their lands; the process is already underway. And that process is driven by storytelling, by narrating otherness out of a dominant position in the ideology of the invaders and replacing it with a narrative cohesion that is both strong and fragile" (1995, p. 274). *Almanac* contains numerous plotlines that attribute a miraculous power to story.

Two dark fables with a focus on the power of story to affect reality appear relatively early in *Almanac*. The character Lecha describes the first exercise of her psychic powers in exacting revenge for the television producer's girlfriend whose former boyfriend, a cinematographer, had torched her apartment, killing her cat and two dogs (p. 143). Lecha invites the revenge-seeker to tell her everything she could about the cinematographer's family, whose lives Lecha perceives as "stories-in-progress" which she proceeds to control through storytelling with deadly results:

Lecha had merely begun to tell the stories of the ends of their lives. The producer's girlfriend had been pleased to see results after only two weeks. The cinematographer's mother had undergone emergency surgery for an intestinal blockage only to learn that the snarled threads of cancer held her liver and pancreas in a tumorous web. Lecha had been a little surprised at how quickly the cancer developed, since she had only just made up the ending to the mother's story. (p. 144)

Lecha attributes her deadly narrative power to her tutelage by a Yupik

woman who crashes planes using story-power: “Lecha had seen what the old Yupik woman could do with only a piece of weasel fur, a satellite weather map on a TV screen and the spirit energy of a story” (p. 159). The Yupik woman, the narrator explains, “had gathered great surges of energy out of the atmosphere, by summoning spirit beings through recitations of the stories that were also indictments of the greedy destroyers of the land. With the stories the old woman was able to assemble powerful forces flowing from the spirits of ancestors” (p. 156). While Lecha’s exercise of narrative power may seem venial, the Yupik woman’s story-power works to prevent further exploitation of Alaskan land.

Both instances of story-power prompt reflections about the spirit power of *Almanac* itself, whose central plot movement—the rise of an indigenous people’s army to take back the land—Silko offers as a contribution to the process of decolonization. But there is more—“here’s the kicker”: three years after the publication of *Almanac of the Dead* in 1991, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) declared war on the government of Mexico (January 1, 1994). Silko’s fictional rebellion and the actual, corporeal one being waged from the Lacandón jungle have a startling intertextual relationship that Deborah Horvitz documents in her scholarly essay “Freud, Marx, and Chiapas in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*” (1998, p. 47). In his 1994 book *BASTA! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas*, George Collier explains, “‘In the summer of 1993, Tucson writer Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), a novel prognosing native [sic] American rebellion from Chiapas to Arizona, suddenly captured an audience of readers in Chiapas [Collier 1]’” (quoted in Horvitz, 1998, pp. 47-48). The Chiapas rebellion’s leader, Subcomandante Marcos, released his book *Shadows of Tender Fury* in 1995, with an endorsement by Silko printed on the back. Deborah Horvitz writes, “*Almanac of the Dead* (1991) predicts a revolution beginning in Chiapas that is astonishing in its similarities to and parallels with the EZLN uprising. An undeniable textual relationship exists between the imagined revolt and the Chiapas rebellion” (1998, p. 47). This documented instance of an intertext connecting art and life can be read simply as an instance of a novelist using rhetoric successfully to mobilize social action. However, there would seem to be more indirect connections between Silko’s literary activity and the eruption of political action on the part of indigenous people in Chiapas. After all, it is unlikely that many *campesinos* read Silko, and they comprised the majority of the fighting force. Direct rhetorical effects could account only partially for the synchronicity of the novel’s plot and the Chiapan rebellion. Jung’s account

of synchronicity, along with Benjamin's and Taussig's speculation about the change-producing powers of mimesis, offer possible explanation of the more indirect, intangible connections between story and life outside story.

Synchronicity is strange, and the permeability of text and life outside text unnerving.

That potential power of mimetic activity to generate synchronicity and change in life outside art might help explain a similarly eerie incident from the life of the painter Remedios Varo, a Spanish-born surrealist, whose work is highly narrative. Varo, who spent her childhood in Madrid, married one Gerardo Lizarraga in her teens to escape her parents' house and start a life as an artist in Barcelona. She left Lizarraga shortly thereafter, fleeing the Spanish Civil War with poet Benjamin Peret, who introduced her into the inner circle of surrealists in Paris between the two World Wars. When the Nazis reached Paris during WWII, and surrealist artists were being persecuted, Varo and Peret, who both endured imprisonment themselves, escaped to Marseilles, where they faced a year of living dangerously before securing passage to Mexico.

Before leaving Paris, Varo went with her friend Emerico Weisz to see a documentary about French concentration camps that Weisz had helped make. As they watched the film, Varo spotted her abandoned husband Lizarraga, with whom she had lost all contact, among the detainees on film. Having seen that Lizarraga had been detained, Varo set out to find him. She did find him, even though he had been moved among camps three times. She achieved his release by bribing guards. After Remedios secured Lizarraga's release, the two divorced officially, remaining friends until the end of their lives. Varo's first biographer, Janet Kaplan, describes the incident like this: "It had been pure chance that led Weisz to film Lizarraga's camp, pure chance that he had filmed Lizarraga himself (a man he did not know), and pure chance that Varo had seen the film" (Kaplan, 1988, p. 70). Chance, certainly, but also a form of synchronicity.

I am inclined to expand Jung's term synchronicity to include phenomena that could be called "magic" in Covino's sense—changes produced in the material world by means of language, story, and other methods of altering consciousness so that the unconscious plays a greater role in cognition. Mimesis pursues alterity, as do intoxication and other surrealist methodologies like automatic writing, exquisite corpse, and collage. When I consider some of the coincidences that mark Remedios Varo's life story, I wonder whether, when the unconscious is allowed greater dominance in cognition, the resulting contraction and/or relativization of space and time allows the thinker not just to *perceive* events subliminally, but also to *affect* events subliminally, as the

observer of modern physics affects what is observed. The synchronicities that surround Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*, Varo's life story, and, as I will detail next, my practice of scholarship, suggests that textual and aesthetic events may mobilize changes in material events. The ascendancy of the unconscious—activated through the power of mimesis—seems actually to set events in motion sometimes, resulting in a proliferation of coincidence, of synchronicity.

Although Jung, keen to fit his thinking into a scientific paradigm, would never use a word like “magic” to describe the dynamic, he does suggest that emotions “play [a role] in the occurrence of synchronistic events” (1973, p. 32). Jung quotes Albertus Magnus, who is summarizing Avicenna on magic: “[A] certain power to alter things indwells in the human soul and subordinates the other things to her, particularly when she is swept into a great excess of love or hate” (1973, p. 32). Avicenna argues that intense emotions alter “bodily substance” and this change in the physical world in turn can alter “other things” (Jung, 1973, p. 32). This may be too fanciful a hypothesis to support argumentatively, but it is irresistible to play with. It is also not very different from the conclusion of modern physicists that the observer affects the observed. If mimesis produces powerful changes in affective states, and affective states produce physical changes, it would explain why, sometimes, extraordinary phenomena attend the practice of writing. If, as Taussig suggests, mimesis gives the imitator power over the imitated, then surrealism, a mimetic practice aimed at simulating the movement of the unconscious, might give the artist a certain power with the unconscious, a way of manipulating and interacting with it. If the unconscious “controls” the phenomenon of synchronicity by “manipulating” time and space, then the practice of surrealism becomes a form of magic. Varo, like other surrealists, has asserted that surrealism is not merely an artistic mode but an approach to or practice of living life. The idea of “objective chance” is central to surrealist philosophy. Seeming to anticipate Jung, André Breton defines it as “the form of the manifestation of external necessity that finds its way to the unconscious” (in Rosemont, 1999, p. 83). Penelope Rosemont, a contemporary surrealist, elaborates, “The surrealist concept of objective chance identifies unforeseen encounters that coincide amazingly with one's own desire” (1999, p. 83). Breton and his heirs, much preoccupied with the idea, frequently write about its often astonishing operations. Benjamin, who connects reading itself with telepathic process, considers this literary tradition a potent stimulant of profane illumination. He writes, “The most passionate investigation of telepathic phenomena ... will not teach us half so much about reading (which is an eminently telepathic process), as the profane il-

lumination of reading about telepathic phenomena” (1978, p. 190). Rosemont continues the surrealist tradition of documenting “objective chance” in “Surrealism, Encounters, Ted Joans,” her profile of a surrealist poet with an apparent gift for being “participant in, and stimulator of, highly improbable yet far-reaching chance encounters” (1999, p. 86). Varo seems to have had the same gift. After my interest in allegory and modernist women led me to undertake research about Varo’s life, my experience of scholarship became curiously rich in synchronicity.

Fittingly, I discovered Varo’s paintings by chance. Fifteen years ago, I was working as a bookseller, neatening the art section at the bookstore where I worked while I waited for a tenure-track job. Re-shelving a book titled *Unexpected Journeys: The Life and Art of Remedios Varo*, I paged through to find images that struck me square in the heart and mind. I showed the book to anyone who would look. By a stroke of luck, the only retrospective of Varo’s work that has ever been mounted in North America appeared in Chicago, at the National Museum of Mexican Art, in 2000. I visited that exhibition five times. No one to whom I mentioned Varo, including people with Fine Art or Art History degrees, had heard of her. As my fascination with Varo developed, and after publishing my first book, the essay collection *Women and Experimental Filmmaking*, I began to think that someone should make a film about Remedios Varo. I solicited the participation of a filmmaker friend, and we began by planning an experimental animated short film based on Varo’s painting *The Clockmaker*. Excepting the fortunate appearance of the retrospective, however, my story so far has little in it of improbable chance or of life and art intermingling. An extraordinary coincidence did, however, mobilize a fortuitous development in my research which had, in gravitating toward film production, crossed that boundary ordinarily observed by scholars of “publishing” their research in article form.

While production planning was in its earliest stages, I was making the acquaintance of a new colleague in the English department. Eventually, in the process of rattling through the landscapes of our film, book, and visual art obsessions, I got around to saying, “Oh—I have to show you the work of Remedios Varo sometime—she’s a surrealist painter who. . . .” “Oh Remedios Varo,” my friend interrupted, “I’ve been looking at her work for years. My friend Lois knows Varo’s former husband, Walter Gruen . . .” As Gruen, who died early this year, at the time controlled the rights to all reproduction of Varo images and owned the rights to her life story, this chain of acquaintance became a source of serendipity that directly benefited my scholarly activity. The coincidental friendships leading to Gruen and the propitious

timing of discovering this connection cast a glimmer of profane illumination onto my intellectual activity surrounding Varo. The glimmer burst into a blaze during a subsequent visit with the Gruens. The film's director and I traveled to Mexico City to view paintings and begin the process of obtaining film rights. Visiting Walter Gruen in his home was a powerfully moving experience—intellectually and emotionally. His story occupies a considerable segment of Varo scholarship. Gruen, who survived three Nazi death camps before emigrating to Mexico and becoming successful in business, saved Varo from poverty and obscurity in Mexico City. In addition to having provided the material circumstances that enabled her to attain artistic maturity, Gruen, at great personal inconvenience and expense, won the legal right to make the largest gift in the history of Mexico to an art museum, filling several rooms with Varo works to which the public will now forever have access. Facing Mr. Gruen, whose image I had seen before only in drawings and photographs, I felt scholarship and life, art and life, merge.

Defining “surrealist experience,” Rosemont writes:

surrealists have found the *fortuitous encounter* to be an unparalleled igniter of sparks, a lightning rod of electricity, an exchange of electrons, and above all a transmitter of *spontaneous knowledge* and therefore a means of revolutionizing everyday life.

All of the experiences that can properly be called surrealist—from mad love to the vertigo of objective chance . . . start with encounters. What *is a surrealist experience?* Nothing less than the *direct experience of poetry as it is lived in the moment* [Rosemont's italics]. (1999, p. 4)

Research and writing, whether scholarly or otherwise creative, regularly produce interpenetrations of life and art for me. Surrealist experiences, profane illuminations, serendipities continue to arise as I pursue the intellectual and aesthetic interest that led me to Varo in the first place. Not long after the Mexico City trip, I received a grant to visit Spain to research a novel which is a coming-of-age story about women who write and paint. In Madrid, I retraced Varo's steps—went to stand in front of Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* at the Prado, because Remedios grew up looking at it. One day, following Benjamin's ideal of the flaneuse and the principle of “automatic” praxis favored by the surrealists, I decided to forgo the guidebook and wandered randomly, to see where I might find myself and what I might see by chance. During my progress down the Calle de Alcalá, two

gigantic fluted columns flanking the entrance to a massive baroque building caught my visual interest. My eyes, drawn up the columnar fluting toward the portico, settled on letters carved in the stone. It was the Real Academia de Bellas Artes San Fernando, the school where Varo trained as an artist. Walking the great halls and corridors where Remedios refined her artistic gifts, I contemplated the same paintings and sculpture she studied every day of her life in art school, then continued down the Calle where I leapt across the traffic circle to dip my fingers in Neptune's fountain, because I knew Varo must have done this in the late '20s when she was making herself into a painter and writer—a founding sister of European modernism. I tell this story to illustrate how the processes scholars employ to generate insight are not necessarily different from those employed by novelists, poets, and other artists. In addition to linear, logical, and rational thought, there is also, for many, ritualistic behavior like pilgrimage, a kind of open-ended quest driven by fairly idiosyncratic and personal fascination. Scholarship involves reverie, experimentation, impulse, emotion, and whimsy.

Since the Enlightenment, humanities scholars have attempted to legitimize their activity by borrowing some of the cognitive moves of science—logical reasoning, empirical “data” (close reading), or evidentiary procedures. Enlightenment epistemology, trying to distance itself from pre-modern cognitive strategies, privileges scientific method, discredits intuition, and discourages preoccupation with invisible phenomena. This epistemological turn was urgently necessary if university minds were to be released from considerations like “How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?” But the genesis of scholarship and the university in religion should perhaps not be forgotten. Scholarship—the practice of formalized, ritualized, public thinking—arises from the same wellspring as art. Both may be described as human attempts to consider matters of ultimacy, combined with a desire to give meaning and expression to the contents of experience. As the growth of the university and the idea of scholarship evolved beyond the Middle Ages, intellectual life has perhaps forgotten the roots of scholarship in basic human attempts to impart meaning to experience. With the hegemony of a scientific paradigm, and the emergence of literary criticism as a profession, scholarship comes under a socioeconomic pressure to maintain its legitimacy by being as “professional” as possible, as distanced from the nonrational as possible, as compliant with the dominant epistemological paradigm as possible. As little like dream, speculation, and imaginative fancy as possible. As little like art.

If we could credit art with knowledge-making value, we could probably also restore to scholarship its elements of spiritual quest and meaningful

play. If we thought of literature scholarship as a form of mimetic play, an extension of ritual activity, we might not make so stark a distinction between art and scholarship. (Of course, that might make scholars as economically vulnerable as most artists, and what comfortable and successful scholar would want that?) The art/scholarship distinction consists in, it seems, an effort to keep epistemological modalities—ways of knowing—separate, and to force writers to align themselves with one or another form of cognition. From artists, we tolerate intuition, indirection, tentativeness. From scholars we want reason, directness, intellectual force. A more capacious understanding of the act of scholarship might grant to scholarship epistemological prerogatives we have long allowed to poetry, fiction, and visual art: lack of mastery, provisional or partial knowing, intuitive knowing, even *unknowing* or, following Benjamin, mildly inebriated knowing.

So why trouble the boundaries between modalities of knowing? I am probably not alone in having felt constricted as a writer, as a scholar, at times, by the institutional boundaries that organize and regulate literature scholarship, making “mastery” and a strictly rational “knowing,” the measure of successful scholarship. I don’t feel successful as a thinker without drawing conclusions: A kind of focused *wondering* seems inadequate for me, whereas it might be acceptable for a poet or novelist. This is not to say that successful poets are not highly disciplined and intentional, or that they do not employ logical thought. They do, of course. However, genre expectations for those the academy traditionally calls “creative writers” remain far more permissive than the expectations governing scholarship. Personally, I have had difficulty settling on an appropriate writerly genre for pursuing and representing the most salient insights generated by my research. Hybrid forms are increasingly acceptable in literature scholarship, but they are not without market risks like tenure complications, difficulty publishing, or even just disapprobation. Probably, these issues affect countless students and professors whose efforts to live out that much-fussed-over ideal of “lifelong learning” are hampered, slowed, impeded, or stopped by social-institutional pressure to align oneself with one or another epistemological mode, one or another genre of writing. In some institutions, scholars aren’t taken seriously as scholars if they also write novels and poems. And few and far between are those appointed Visiting Artists if they produce too many terribly clear and coherent essays, especially if those essays contain footnotes and bibliographies. The number of writers who successfully bridge this divide is surprisingly small, probably because writers feel an invisible pressure to define themselves professionally as *either* scholar or

creative writer. And department hiring procedures slot people into one or another institutional role.

In truth, probably many of us cannot pursue the questions that truly interest us without crossing borders between scholarship and artistry, scholarship and life, life and art. Thankfully, certain late-20th century scholarly methodologies—new historicism, cultural studies, postcolonial theory, queer theory, performance studies—provide integrative critical frameworks for literary study. But these frameworks, while collapsing any boundary between social sciences and literature scholarship, life and text, mostly leave intact a boundary between scholarship and art, “creative” and scholarly writing. Writers in the academy make decisions about genre, voice, and rhetorical strategy based in part on whether they seek to define themselves as scholar or as some other kind of writer. Decisions about what to produce also depend on whether the writers want or have tenure, how their institution handles issues of academic freedom, what they teach, and where they want to be published. How one answers questions about genre can determine promotion, rank or tenure possibilities, publication options, fellowship eligibility, and professional identity. Of course, writers belabor such questions. Recently, I had the practical professional problem of wondering whether scholarship that resulted in a film would be valued in a five-year post-tenure review. Can a film be considered a significant achievement in scholarly development? If I carry the project further, would research that results in a screenplay detract from or complicate my professional identity as a scholar? Luckily, I teach at an institution that offers film degrees and encourages interdisciplinarity, so the answers for me are probably positive. But I wonder about my colleagues pursuing integrative research in more traditional departments, or at more traditional schools.

Theorists of interdisciplinarity could do many scholars a service by devoting additional attention to considering how genre, media, and academic tradition shape the conduct *and* presentation of integrative research. Integrative scholars do justice to the spirit of interdisciplinarity when their products, as well as their thinking, venture outside the bounds of conventional scholarship. There is every reason to acknowledge that what motivates us as scholars may exceed the boundaries of rational inquiry, may arise from personal as well as academic curiosity, may involve aesthetic as well as intellectual desires. If, as Benjamin suggests, thinking itself provides passage to alterity, then scholarship, like other creative processes, has the potential to transform the ordinary into the marvelous, producing varieties of profane illumination that need not be suppressed or disguised as we evolve forms that suit the complexity and integration of our insights.

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Note

¹ See A. Fletcher (1964). Chap. 4: "Allegorical Causation: Magic and Ritual Form." In *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (pp. 181-219). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

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