Whether or not clarity is enough, it is certainly not enough to throw around the term “clarity,” since that term obviously means very different things to different people, and stands in urgent need of clarification.[1]

—Hans-Johann Glock
What is there more mysterious than clarity?[2]

—Paul Valéry

If reading is not to be simply synonymous with deciphering, commentary or even interpretation, Geoffrey Bennington has written, then it must inevitably encounter the question of the unreadable. If I can simply read what I read, then what I am doing is not in fact reading but something else (processing, decoding, unscrambling). Reading as such occurs only as and in the experience of the unreadable. Not processing, decoding, unscrambling, neither is it deciphering, commentary or even interpretation. Reading is an activity irreducible to any other that may, at first glance, be thought to be synonymous with it. Whatever else it is, reading is not something one does. Nor, it appears, is it something one can do simply. If reading as such occurs only as and in the experience of the unreadable, and if the unreadable can be identified with the illegible, reading for all that remains no less difficult to place.

The very act of recognizing moments of illegibility, Craig Dworkin has written, cancels their status as such; reading the illegible nullifies its own account in the precise moment of its construction and obliterates the very object it would claim to have identified, creating a new space of erasure which cannot itself be read. In that moment of singularity the unreadable disappears within its own legibility, and that legibility simultaneously effaces the text it would seem to read. No longer simply synonymous with deciphering, commentary or even interpretation, yet incapable of articulation without their resources, situated only as and in the experience of the unreadable, yet given over to that experience only insofar as the unreadable itself will have escaped one, where may reading as such be said to occur? How is one to make sense of it?

Writing of novelty in metaphysics, A.W. Moore claims it is not simply that a radically new way of making sense of things will, of necessity, have been unforeseeable. The introduction of a radically new way of making sense of things is unforeseeable in the more profound sense that, until that way of making sense of things has been introduced, there is no way even of making sense of its introduction. As Jean-François Lyotard has observed, We read only; necessarily; radically; at all because we do not know how to read. Images via.

References:


About the Author:
Michael Munro is author of the open access chapbook, *The Communism of Thought* (Punctum Books, 2014).

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**You may also like**

**Michael Munro: Prose**

We may laugh at the bourgeois’s inability to parrot his master’s lesson, but we may well wonder whether, just as he has been speaking prose unwittingly, he may...
unwittingly state a truth about it. Indeed, what might that truth be, and how might that statement, in its peculiar inconsistency, be said to be of a piece with it?

Michael Munro On Spinoza
Philosophy

Immanence is not philosophy, nor philosophy immanence. But there is in the passage from one to the other a modification of sense that is not without significance. It is perhaps for that reason that the two formulas are best read together. At the point of vertigo.

A Quotation And Provocation By Michael Munro

The teleology of the Universe is directed to the production of Beauty.[1] That is the opening line of the text, its first thesis. Itâ€™s also a quotation â€” a quotation and provocation from the late work of Alfred North Whitehead that sets the stage for everything to follow. And yet, Oglesby is measured. She immediately acknowledges that Steven Shaviro â€” another guiding light of the study â€” â€œdoubtless speaks for manyâ€ when he calls Whiteheadâ€™s claim â€œoutrageously hyperbolic.â€

An Enigma Wrapped Inside An Enigma By Michael Munro
Philosophy

There is perhaps nothing more enigmatic in the history of philosophy than that which in the tradition is known as the active intellect (nous poiâ€”tikos, alâ€”aql al-faâ€”â€œl). The few dense, cryptic sentences in which Aristotle gives it its inaugural formulation, which comprise the whole of the fifth chapter of book three of the De Anima, are on one scholarâ€™s estimation the â€œmost intensely studied sentences in the history of philosophy.â€

Editor's Picks

Melissa Broderâ€™s Latest 32 Tweets

almost ready to be ok but not yet

Janice Lee For the Ghost

The memories are like stutters. Sometimes I inhale for air, and exhale a shaking chain of memories. A choking hazard. I for the ghost. The ghost for me.

D. Joyce-Ahearne on Federico GarcÃ­a Lorca
D. JOYCE-AHEARNE

If duende, the source of inspiration that Lorca sets out to champion in his essay at the expense of the Muse, is â€œin sum, the spirit of the earthâ€, a force linking body and soil through a struggle akin to death, then the Muse is a force that speaks to the head and inspires art that is, in the wordsâ€™ most negative senses, cerebral and high-minded.

'We Like Philosophers And Live Like Fools.' by Shane Jesse Christmass

Burton was born in Kentucky. He moved itinerantly before settling in Oakland. Temperatures rise, so does the suicide rate.

Jenny Diski is not cheery or brave or serene at the momentâ€¦
JENNY DISKI

lâ€™ve been writing a more or less monthly memoir of my life in the sixties and seventies when I lived with Doris Lessing, and my continuing relationship with her until her death last year at 94. It is also an ongoing portrait of my incurable cancer.

‘U-Turn’ by Maggie Smith

From seat 8A, clouds mountainous, lâ€™m considering flat-earthers.
The cars came scudding in towards Dublin, running evenly like pellets in the groove of the Naas Road. At the crest of the hill at Inchicore sightseers...