A Response to Michael O'Driscoll

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Michael O'Driscoll's argument for a new understanding of the "text-as-index" as the key to Modernism's "archival consciousness" is something of an index itself. Its rich intertextuality, both explicit and implicit, intended and unintended, indicates significant directions for further consideration. A full index of these indications is impossible here, so in what follows, I limit my discussion to some of the less obvious ones: contemporary ethical and political theory, cybernetics, posthumanism, psychoanalysis, and a deconstructive theory of the archive.

Though O'Driscoll restricts his discussion to Pound's text-as-index method as a hallmark of Modernism's archival consciousness, his identification of index with utopia opens numerous possible avenues of engagement. Most provocatively, it evokes the ethico-political logic of Giorgio Agamben's *The Coming Community*. The connection between the two comes from recognizing that the index is a set analogous to mathematical sets: it groups together a range of terms under a common heading. The particular character of the terms in an index is their exemplarity. For Agamben, this means they constitute a "set of sets": they constitute a set of terms whose commonality is that they are representative members of other, disparate, sets. By exemplifying their source sets, they simultaneously belong to and exceed them. They are united in the index not because they share any essence, but because they are at once identified with and separable from their original sets. Their commonality is not essential, but a direct function of their being grouped together in the index: "Being-called or being-in-language is the non-predicative property par excellence that belongs to each member of a class and at the same time makes its belonging an aporia" (73).

For Agamben, this aspect of set theory provides the basis for a correct understanding of being which, if embraced widely enough

will bring about his utopian vision of *The Coming Community*. Taking human beings not as independent individuals who relate to one another through common essences, but as singularities which rise forth in particular and fluid manners, Agamben posits a utopian community—a set of these singularities, an index—whose membership is the function of "no essence, no historical or spiritual vocation, no biological destiny" (43), but intermediation. Living in accord with this understanding constitutes the only ethical possibility for humans, and will—when it prevails widely enough—bring about the coming community (Agamben 43).

O'Driscoll's connection of print culture's techniques of textual management to "new psychic, textual and architectural spaces" as well as to restructured "topoi of the mind and of the text" (11) clarifies the link between his essay and Agamben's theory. The ways in which the index, the text-as-index, and archival consciousness articulate new possibilities for the psyche and the mind feed into the set theory that undergirds Agamben's ethico-political vision, and inextricably link them. O'Driscoll's ascription of a utopian impulse behind the index begins to look like much more than simply an argument about Modernism's archival consciousness. Instead, it suggests that Pound's indexical method and concern to illuminate the conspiracy of intelligence that could save Western civilization fuse form and content into a powerful ethico-political intervention—one that no doubt lacked the terms for its full articulation during Pound's lifetime—that makes of Pound a pioneering thinker of posthumanist being, ethics, and community.[1]

O'Driscoll's account of text-as-index further positions Pound as a key pioneer "at the dawn of what we now recognize as the age of information" (2), anticipating cybernetics, information systems theories, and posthumanism by seeking patterns in randomness rather than depth beneath surface. This placement counters the conventional understanding of Pound as searching for meaning in a world that has given way to "mere anarchy" (Yeats 4). Breaking with the surface/depth model of such an understanding, O'Driscoll suggests that text-as-index employs "systems of reference rather than meaning" (3), elevating pattern over message, and presaging the epochal shift from hermeneutics to poststructuralism, from hu-

[1] Of course, Pound's commitment to his utopian vision lead him into profoundly unethical behaviour, and to condone what Agamben clearly identifies as Evil (31-2). This consequence reveals the perils of trying to realize utopia without its necessary attendant: a qualitative shift in human being.

manism to posthumanism. Moreover, its thrust is not simply inter-textual, as O'Driscoll asserts, but in fact hypertextual. Consider the following as a description not just of the index (as O'Driscoll intends), but also of hypertext: "ideally [it] functions as a kind of self-effacing signifier or a graphic re-presentation of textual documents that dissolves before the reader's very eyes, giving way to a utopian space of cohesive fragments unmarked by difference" (27). How does this passage not describe the experience of following a hyper-link down the rabbit hole of the internet? In its effort to take a reader directly from the present text to a referent, the text-as-index articulates a wish for immediate delivery of the signified that is virtually granted by today's computational networks. It is not merely intertextual, but nascently hypertextual. Picture a young Pound setting out today to produce the online *Cantos*, with hyperlinks to the full texts of the central documents in the conspiracy of intelligence, carving a pattern of significance—not meaning—out of the "overwhelming burden of printed texts that was the twentieth-century's inheritance" (8).

When given its full scope, O'Driscoll's placement of Pound at the brink of the information age, and as a pioneer of "reference rather than meaning," paves the way for reconsidering texts like *The Waste Land*, *Paterson*, *The Cantos*, *Spring and All*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake* as precursors to cold-war information systems and cybernetics—not to mention the conspiracy theories they seem to have encouraged. It allows us to see Modernism anew, and to understand more fully how it laid the groundwork for today's textually-dense but apparently meaning-poor world. Moreover, it clarifies the tendential posthumanism of the indexical method's utopianism (as fleshed out by Agamben) as an inherent feature of the transition from meaning to pattern, and from human beings as individuals to singularities as patterns of information (see, e.g., N. Katherine Hayles).

There is, however, another vein of O'Driscoll's essay that runs counter to the utopian-cybernetic-posthumanist lines I've been following so far: the archival unconscious. This line of discussion relies upon the psychoanalytic notion of *nachträglichkeit*, introduced by O'Driscoll in his discussion of the libidinal economics of Woolf's, MacNeice's, and above all Pound's and brings O'Driscoll to posit that along with Virginia Woolf and Louis MacNeice, Pound's relationship with the archive is fraught, even traumatic: facing the full weight of the British Museum Library's holdings, "Pound… reminds one of Freud's Wolf Man, looking up from his childish height to see his parents in the act, *coitus a tergo*, an event of

such traumatic insistence that it can only be repressed and destined to return from the future, in an instance of Freudian *nachträglichkeit*. It is that return of the repressed, that return from the future, that is of particular interest to me here as it takes shape in *Guide to Kulchur*" (5). Strangely, though O'Driscoll returns to the relationship between *The Cantos* and *Guide to Kulchur*, archival consciousness and text-as-index, later in his essay, he drops the Freudian register that provides the enabling metaphor of *nachträglichkeit*. It's a strikingly odd disappearance. It is almost as though psychoanalysis appears unbidden here and is then banished from the remainder of the essay along with the libidinal concerns it would have made unavoidable. Only one further moment belongs to the same register: referring to Pound's inability to escape lists in *Guide to Kulchur*, even when he explicitly disavows them, O'Driscoll writes, "*Guide to Kulchur* is haunted by its own indexical methodology; such lists… assert their indomitable presence, not to mention their instability[;] they re-occur in different forms—with shifting contents, structures, and logics—throughout the text" (22). O'Driscoll does everything but name the lists as what they patently are: symptoms. The language used, the dynamic outlined, the reference to haunting in the context of the previous mention of *nachträglichkeit*, all point to a return of the repressed and thus to a psychic mechanism demanding interpretation.

As such, I suggest that there is an unconscious in O'Driscoll's essay that points to the possibility of an archival unconscious itself. One key to exploring this possibility concerns the relationship between the archive/heterotopia and the index/utopia. If the index is the product of a utopian urge to provide order to the archive, then the archive may equally be the heterotopian unconscious that constantly shatters the index:

> Heterotopias, Foucault tells us, "… are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and opposite one another) to 'hold together.'" (26)

Foucault could just as easily be describing the unconscious here as heterotopias, and indeed there is a certain continuity: the unconscious *is* a heterotopia, and heterotopias disrupt indexes just as the

unconscious disrupts consciousness. Every consciousness, like every index, "ultimately point[s] outward, beyond the text in hand, beyond the impossible utopia of language, to a plurality of sites that can be only momentarily juxtaposed in the non-site of the indexical text [or, I suggest, unconscious]. In this form, text[/consciousness] as index resists a permanent inclusiveness by asserting its centrifugal power" (26). As O'Driscoll makes clear, Pound's texts as indexes always already have unconsciouses that permanently disrupt cohesion. The utopia is permanently ruptured by the archive's heterotopic energies; every attempt to contain them only generates new eruptions.

As with all symptoms, this one points to an absent cause: *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Triangulating already upon the archive and Freud, O'Driscoll's text solicits Derrida's book as both its third term and a key to thinking through the link between Pound's poetics and his politics. As O'Driscoll establishes, though the archive in the abstract is heterotopian, specific archives are often closely restricted. They are sites of "privilege and the logic of exclusion" (7). As such, they expose the archive's nomological and prescriptive origins: "'archive' refers to the *arkhe* in the *nomological* sense, to the *arkhe* of the commandment" (Derrida 2). Derrida clarifies by describing the archons who produce these commandments:

> The archons are first of all the documents' guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives. Entrusted to such archons, these documents in effect speak the law: they recall the law and call on or impose the law. (2)

For all their heterotopic energies in the abstract, archives in the particular are dense sites not only of privilege and exclusion, but also of interpretation, authority, the law, competence, and power. In this respect, it is clear further that Pound regards himself as the *über*-archon of kulchur, dictating to all who will listen not just what to read but how to read, and how to proceed after having read. He figures himself as the guardian of the documents that comprise the conspiracy of intelligence, their chief interpreter, arbiter of readerly competence, legislator and top cop.

O'Driscoll points out that Pound's program of indexing the archive is notionally totalitarian: "Ultimately, lists and catalogues are to be discarded… on the way to… what [Pound] calls a 'totalitarian

literature'" (21). Indexes must go in favour of an archive whose lessons must be absorbed and their sources (along with the index) forgotten in the attainment of true understanding. Knowledge is a dialectical way station on the path to full understanding, which will cancel and preserve it in a qualitative expansion of consciousness. In this sense, Pound's program is utopian in its celebration of understanding over mere erudition. Of course, the benchmark for true understanding in is none other than Pound himself, and the archive upon which we must draw in our effort to achieve full understanding is that of which Pound is the archon. He is the walking index to *the* authoritative archive of culture; he embodies the indexical's "bid for a kind of mastery" (O'Driscoll 27). The primacy of his archive depends upon his declaration of its primacy and of his ability to convince others of it. It replicates the totalitarian politics of the charismatic leader where authority trumps rationality in service of an idiosyncratic but magnetic worldview. Derrida's revelation of the depths to which dynamics of power, prestige, and privilege are embedded in the very notion of the archive thus helps expose the link between Pound's archival consciousness and his politics. At the same time, it places the utopian and the totalitarian into unwonted proximity, and urges us to explore more carefully Modernism's archival impulse in relation to its variegated politics.

The final indication I want to elucidate here concerns the location of the archive. O'Driscoll ends his essay thus: "Text as index, designed to lead the reader out of the archive, instead leads the reader further inward to its fatal core" (27). The topoi of in/out here belie the real complexity of O'Driscoll's contribution. In what sense can text-as-index be said to be trying to lead the reader "out" of the archive, particularly if, as in Pound's case, it patently wants us to explore the archive more fully? In what sense can an archive be said to have a core, and why should it be the innermost point? Wouldn't it make equal sense to think of the archive's "core" as its limit? Moreover, given the intense ambiguities and ambivalences that attend any archivalist enterprise (is this document worth saving? how accessible should it be? what impression does it carry/leave/record?) how can we think the archive/index matrix in terms of the utopian/heterotopian matrix? And what of that other term, suppressed for so long now, dystopian? How do we—or can we—incorporate Milan Kundera's distasteful metaphor (and how archive its multiple iterations): "The archive's ideal [is] the sweet equality that reigns in an enormous common grave" (97). In terms of its relevance for Modernism, the question comes full circle: is

the hallmark of Modernism archival consciousness, as O'Driscoll suggests, or is it only the method of text-as-index? Are the two inseparable, or is their peculiar fusion in the twentieth-century long poem what makes Modernism special?

O'Driscoll's essay raises many more questions than I can even ask here. Allow me to close, then, by juxtaposing two images from the modernist archive. Ultimately, O'Driscoll teaches us that the significance of each item in the archive, and of the archive itself, lies in its capacity to function as what Pound called a "luminous detail": a fact which is "not merely 'significant' nor 'symptomatic' in the manner of most facts, but capable of giving one 'a sudden insight into circumjacent conditions, into their causes, their effects, into sequence, and law" (Pound 21-2). The result, O'Driscoll has made inescapably clear, is that we must seek their significance in the very heart of darkness—Modernism, the archive—knowing that it will be found "not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that, sometimes, are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine" (Conrad 45).

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