

“Ignorance is an intellectual defect, imperfection, privation, or shortcoming.” So begins James Ferrier’s “The Agnoiogy,” the section of his treatise, *The Institutes of Metaphysic* (1854), in which he describes a theory of ignorance.

In sympathy with Ferrier, *Ignorance: Between Knowing and Not Knowing* concerns the nature of ignorance, its relationship to knowledge and its differentiation from merely not knowing. However, this book additionally considers how different forms of ignorance exert force within the creation and reception of art. These topics are explored through a range of essays drawn from contributors within the fields of philosophy, literary theory, and art criticism.

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IGNORANCE

Morrison
Sandström

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Between Knowing and Not Knowing

Gavin Morrison
Sigrid Sandström
(editors)

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Frontispiece and tailpiece:
Olav Westphalen, *Untitled* (2008)

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AXL BOOKS

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Hear, Here

Jeanine Oleson

Introduction

THIS IS A collection of excerpts from the libretto for a recent experimental opera¹ that I wrote and directed, and was performed at The New Museum in New York June 2014. The opera combined written and appropriated anxiety and absurdity with catalytic objects, musicality, and was the collective creation of six actors and three musicians. The piece attempts to examine the internal and external spaces of subjectivity through language and formal means.

The libretto was written to gather language (and its dissolution) into a situation engaging performers and audience in active exchange about the larger world reflecting on how the internal sense of Self is affected by something external to us. It asks of us to pay attention to the transformation that occurs in one's relationship to an(y) other. The libretto led us through a process that was interpretive, generative, and open over a terrain of meaning that was alternately awful and pleasurable. Once in production as opera, entire meanings and stimuli are abandoned, but reason and language arrive back in this document. Sculptures existing between function and objects become, in the opera, both symbols and catalysts for performers' actions. The largest object is a mountain on the outside, when turned it becomes a

felt-lined cave. A horn is formed in the shape of the human ear; a spotlight takes the shape of an eyeball. Other objects/props include a curtain dyed with the image of an eclipse, a shepherd's crook, and clay "scores." Costumes are all similar long gowns with bodices decorated with piping based on vowels.

While texts cannot provide an experience of the performance, these excerpts are language available for contemplation and critique. This has everything to do with ignorance and ignoring.

I. Refrain

Moving Mountains Song [Six actors push and pull a black, planar mountain on hidden wheels and sing this chorus.]

*Hear our ears and stomp your feet
Light our eyes and make us weep
Climb this mountain to avoid the waves
Enter into the softest caves.*

*We pull it here
We pull it there
Workers know
It's never fair.*

*Hail the eye that helps us see
But don't forget what you won't be
If your ear should speak a line
Don't expect it will all sound fine.*

*We pull it there
We pull it here
The end is always
Looming near.*

*A dog could wag to tell you no
And you will leave them on their own
Is the cat alive or dead
It's all happening in your head*

*We pull it here
We pull it there
Workers know
It's never fair.*

*A mountain is the earth up high
A cave is space of unknown why
Land is something we believe
And what comes next who can perceive.*

*We pull it here
We pull it there
Workers know
It's never fair.*

*We pull it there
We pull it here
The end is always
Looming near.*

II. Not Knowing & Belief

Curtain/Hook Solo Song [Singer enters through curtain, spotlighted. Slow, drawn out song eventually falls apart, reforms, then falls apart again. Unseen actor uses shepherd's crook to remove singer as in the vaudeville hook].

*I don't know, I don't know,
I don't know, I don't know,
I don't know, I don't know,
I don't know, I don't know,
OH. You're here to see a show?
I don't know, I don't know,
I don't know, I don't know,
OH. You're here to see a show?
Well all the people come to see
This hatred for humanity.*

Animal Consciousness Talk Show [Two actors sit with a small table between them, as in a talk show format. They nod and smile throughout. A teleconferencing screen appears behind them with a dog sitting at a table in front of a typical cityscape green screen. Dog looks quizzical at camera throughout, though at one point it puts its head down on the table in resignation. Remaining actors mill around and sniff and touch things.]

Actor 1: An international group of prominent scientists has signed The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness in which they are proclaiming their support for the idea that animals are conscious and aware to the degree that humans are — a list of

animals that includes all mammals, birds, and even the octopus. But will this make us stop treating these animals in totally inhumane ways? Teleconferencing in, our guest is Sister, a canine that we live with on a daily basis and yet, don't know much about. She's granted us a rare interview in what I hope to be a more in-depth understanding what drives and motivates her and those like her. We have Professor Dara Dahl from the Univ. of S. Florida, who is an expert on human-animal communications. Professor Dahl, thank you for joining us.

Actor 2: Thank you, thank you for having me on the show.

Actor 1: So, we appreciate your willingness to talk candidly on the show today, Sister.

Dog: ... (on screen)

Actor 1: I think one of the main topics we would like to get down to tonight is whether you're like humans. Do you feel? Are you afraid? Are you happy?

Dog: ...

Actor 2: The absence of a neocortex does not appear to preclude an organism from experiencing affective states.

Actor 1: Stephen Stich, a renowned professor of philosophy at Rutgers University says:

In order for something to have a belief, it must have a concept.

In order to have a concept, one must have particular kinds of knowledge, including knowledge of how the concept relates to other concepts.

*Non-human animals don't have such knowledge.
Therefore, non-human animals don't have beliefs.
What do you think of this statement?*

Dog: ...

Actor 2: Do you have a concept of knowledge and the ethical impact of knowledge's comprehension?

Dog: ...

Actor 1: How do you react to the statement "animals are highly emotional people with very limited intelligence?"

Dog: ...

Actor 2: Do you have a concept of time beyond getting this treat? Is it linear, in the fourth dimension?

Dog: ...

Actor 2: Is your desire for food a sign of consciousness or a reflex? Convergent evidence indicates that non-human animals have the neuroanatomical, neurochemical, and neurophysiological substrates of conscious states along with the capacity to exhibit intentional behaviors.

Dog: ...

Actor 1: When you made a perfect ring of toys on the rug in the green room, was it a symbolic or spiritual gesture?

Dog: ...

Actor 1: Okay, thank you Sister, for your illuminating thoughts as well as your deep knowledge of what makes Sister and her kind so very different or uh, similar to us, Professor Dahl. Thank you, we'll be back in a moment.

III. Plato, or, No Question

Plato [Three actors emerge from behind a curtain. Another actor lifts the ocular spotlight and focuses in on the three.]

Actor 1: You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

Actor 2: True; how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?

Actor 1: Yes.

Actor 3: Very true.

Actor 2: No question.

Actor 3: That is certain.

Actor 1: Far truer.

Actor 2: True.

Actor 3: Not all in a moment.

Actors 1/2: Certainly.

Actor 2/3: Certainly.

Actor 3: Clearly, he would first see the sun and then reason about him.

Actors 1/2: Certainly.

Actor 3: Yes, I think that he would rather suffer anything than entertain these false notions and live in this miserable manner.

Actor 1: To be sure.

Actors 2/3: No question

Shadow Meaning [Actor turns ocular light to illuminate stage's left wall. One actor makes hand shadow animals while remaining actors eagerly guess at and grasp for

words. They're attempting to remember a language.
Their remembering is slow with spurts of knowledge]

<i>Shadow:</i>	<i>Delivered word:</i>
<i>Barking dog</i>	TOLD
<i>Bird</i>	ACCEPT
<i>Camel</i>	PROMISE
<i>Rabbit</i>	CAVE
<i>Moose</i>	WE
<i>Bear</i>	TOLD
<i>Crocodile</i>	CAN

IV. Re-Enactment and The Dawning Of Horror
Political Speech Choir [A podium faces the audience. The actors enact a response choir that moves from enthusiastic belief to discordant questioning. Actors move between each section to reshuffle their staging.]

Actor 1: I think it's clear from our progress today which path is preferable and which path we have chosen.

EVERYONE: PREFERABLE PATH [key of C]

Actor 1: We know that the problems we face are made by human beings; that means it's within our capacity to solve them.

EVERYONE: PROBLEMS SOLVE CAPACITY [E]

Actor 2: Ladies and gentlemen, they say that one-third of the working population in Africa will die of AIDS over the next 20 years.

EVERYONE: WORKING POPULATION [C]

Actor 2: I believe that we must not stand back idly and accept this.

EVERYONE: IDLY ACCEPT [E]

Actor 1: From our use of drones to the detention of terrorist suspects, the decisions that we are making now will define the type of nation — and world, — that we leave to our children.

EVERYONE: DECISIONS DEFINE [C]

Actor 1: Neither I, nor any President, can promise the total defeat of terror.

EVERYONE: PROMISE DEFEAT [E]

Actor 1: But despite our strong preference for the detention and prosecution of terrorists, sometimes this approach is foreclosed.

EVERYONE: DETENTION PROSECUTION [D]

Actor 1: They hide in caves and walled compounds.

EVERYONE: COMPOUNDS CAVES [C]

Actor 3: The reason that this ideology is dangerous is that its implementation is incompatible with the modern world — politically, socially, and economically.

EVERYONE: POLITICALLY SOCIALLY ECONOMICALLY LLY LLY [C]

Actor 3: Why? Because the way the modern world works is through connectivity. Its essential nature is pluralist.

EVERYONE: PLURALIST CONNECTIVITY?? [E]

Actor 3: It favours the open-minded.

EVERYONE: FAVOURS [D]

Actor 3: Modern economies work through creativity and connections. Democracy cannot function except as a way of thinking as well as voting.

EVERYONE: CANNOT FUNCTION [C]

Actor 1: Yes, we can.

EVERYONE: WE SCAN [B]

[refrain]

EVERYONE: PREFERABLE PATH [C]

EVERYONE: PROBLEMS SOLVE CAPACITY

[E]

EVERYONE: WORKING POPULATION [C]

EVERYONE: IDLY ACCEPT [E]

EVERYONE: DECISIONS DEFINE [C]

EVERYONE: PROMISE DEFEAT [E]

EVERYONE: DETENTION PROSECUTION

[D]

EVERYONE: COMPOUNDS CAVES [C]

EVERYONE: POLITICALLY SOCIALLY

ECONOMICALLY LLY LLY [C]

EVERYONE: PLURALIST CONNECTIVITY??

[E]

EVERYONE: FAVOURS [D]

EVERYONE: CANNOT FUNCTION [C]

EVERYONE: WE SCAN [B]

V. The Veil Lifts, Or, Discomfort

Anxiety Address [Actor stands in center of stage, everyone else stands in a line behind her facing the audience, alternately cupping ears to listen and plugging them to silence her address.]

Actor: Hey...hey you guys. I'm not sure what's going to happen. When I live my life, I'm sorta okay, but when I start thinking about what's going on, it's all too much. I'm like, how can we survive this? Why doesn't anyone do anything? What's going to happen like, later today? In a month? I'm terrified when I walk off of this stage, which I'm not really being paid for, but that's okay actually...I'm wondering if the global economy will have crashed, if the tuna sushi I've been eating is definitely high in radiation and I'm poisoned, or maybe someone stole my identity and spent \$537 on lingerie at Walmart that I'll spend months unraveling how to get my bank insurance to cover. Or maybe New York will get really bombed and I'll just happen to be I the path...I dunno. It all seems possible. But I really want to keep living.

VI. Post-Apocalypse/Bliss

Kool-aid Dirge [All actors walk the stage slowly, occasionally encountering one another. They move like they're on a drug trip, like they "drank the Kool-Aid" and believe in the blissed out delivery of language. Libretto spoken as a simultaneous choir. All speak with breath pushed entirely out of the lungs, sighs are long, monotonal, and drawn out.]

Everyone

I can't believe it.

We're here.

It's beautiful.

{SIGH}

I feel so alive.

I've been dug out of the earth to / live again in the sky.

Water has risen and receded

I have gone and / won't come back

We have come and won't / go back.

{SIGH}

I am not you but we are really something.

We are a multitude

We will crawl out into one

We feel / so alive.

{SIGH}

A word means no thing next to my body.

In my body it is every / thing.

The resonance bears down on me.

{SIGH}

You are we and they are me.

What were we supposed to be?

It doesn't matter / now.

I feel so alive.

{SIGH}

I can't believe it.

We're here.

It's beautiful.

{SIGH}

VII. Ending

[All actors lie down inside the cave. One actor sits up and delivers lines.]

Actor 1: Nothing can be said, there is no saying that will possibly tell about this situation. I am hunting for my heart inside of my body and talking to someone's ear. That's a problem for sure.

NOTE

1. *Hear, Here*, experimental opera at the New Museum on June 13-14, 2014, Writer/Director: Jeanine Oleson; Composers: Rainy Orteca and Kelly Pratt (aurihorn solos); Performers: Beth Griffith, David Gould, Lisa Reynolds, Sister, Diwa Tamrong, Tony Torn and nyx zierhut; Musicians: Rainy Orteca, Kelly Pratt and John Michael Swartz; Costumes: Kim Charles Kay; Lighting Design: Derek Wright.