Drool: Liquid Fore-speech of the Fore-scene

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Overflow is the source and fulfillment of a body’s sense. Not only of a body’s sense of fulfillment (as we might say), but also of fulfillment as the sense of sense—the overflowing that sense is. There are bodies and there is sense, and together, in the overflowing of their inextricable mutuality—of bodies overflowing sense and of sense filling up bodies—is fluidly traced the archi-spacing of existence right at, along, and just over the openings and gapes, holes, slits, and orifices of bodies. Thereby existence’s bodily sense is fulfilled.

Neither inner or outer edge, this archi-spacing of existence is simply the edge and outline of what “can simply, imperceptibly, surpass the brim, as water completely filling up a cup forms a slight bulge, a thin convergent meniscus that rises higher than the edge of the glass. The filling up trembles, it is fragile.”

In this quotation from a short essay originally written in homage to Roland Barthes in 2009, now included in his book Adoration, in a section titled “Everyone/Fulfillment (le comble),” Jean-Luc Nancy uses the word “convergent” to describe the meniscus or crescent moon-shaped curved upper surface of the water as it “simply, imperceptibly, surpass[es] the brim” of the glass. It is a curious and I would argue important word choice, that can provide us with a further understanding of the sense and spacing of existence and bodies, not in terms of “lack” and perhaps not even so much in terms of excess, but rather as fulfilled in their overflowing, and overflowing in their fulfillment.

Like pretty much any curved surface, there are two forms that the crescent shape of a meniscus can take: concave (in which the edges of the water touching the sides of its container rise higher than the middle) and convex (in which the middle of the water’s surface rises higher than the edges of the water touching the sides of the vessel). Technically speaking therefore, there is no such thing as a “convergent meniscus.” However, I want to suggest that in describing what is clearly understood to be a convex meniscus formed at the very brim of a glass as “convergent,” Nancy is describing, at once, an overflowing of the perceptible and measurable difference and division between interior and exterior—their convergence or touching—and the convergence of the rising upward or the caving downward of the surface tensions of the convex and concave menisci, respectively. Which is to say that Nancy is describing the indistinguishable convergence of inner and outer pressures on the surface and shape of the water as it is contained by and fills up the glass or cup.

I want to suggest that it is in this way that Nancy provides us with an image—by way of analogy—of existence as fulfilling, to the precise extent that its sense is overflowing. Such that existence is understood to be as precipitously fragile as the meniscus of a liquid formed by a filling up to and imperceptibly surpassing the line or edge of existence—its very brim.

Nancy’s reading of, and response to a chapter of Barthes’ A Lover’s Discourse devoted to the word comblement (fulfillment), while part of his theorization of adoration as a relational exposure to the outside and the open, is also one of the most recent occasions in which he
provides us with a language for theorizing that which is at once anterior to, and is the retreat and withdrawal of, the temporal-spatial punctuation of the phenomenological, philosophical and psychoanalytic “I,” ego, subject and identity. He does this through a vocabulary of the mouth as the very place of the overflowing of sense at the mouth’s opening, gaping and—as I will discuss in this essay—drooling fulfillment. So for instance in the opening lines of Nancy’s text we read:

A condition of adoration: anteriority to “I”…to “I” itself and to its punctual location, which remains a position nonetheless, though fleeting and without dimension. This takes place further upstream: the opening opens behind me, before I open my mouth. “I” could happen in this opening, but does not yet appear, not for the moment; there is only the circle or ellipsis of the mouth, which has not yet been spoken, which precedes not only the sound of words but silent intention too.6

I theorize drool as that bodily fluid that in the fleeting and dimensionless surpassing of the brim of the mouth—specifically during sleep and in leaving a trace (perhaps imperceptible) on the pillow—outlines or traces an “ellipsis of the mouth” as the extended periodicity (not the punctuation of punctuality) and spacing of sense and existence, as that which “takes place further upstream” prior to the opening of orality or enunciation, speech, or indeed even “silent intention.” It is in this way that I theorize drool as the liquid fore-speech of the fore-scene.7

In doing so, I also think of the line or path of drool as tracing the incommensurably shared space of ego/psyche/soul/body’s extension and exposure8, to which Nancy’s thinking has been devoted for over thirty years, since at least the late-1970s and in particular in his writing on Descartes and Freud, and with which he remains occupied right up to the present.9

So while Nancy only explicitly refers to drool or drooling on a couple of occasions, nonetheless there are many instances in which this particular bodily fluid can come to name that “something” that he has enabled us to think that is irreducible to substance; is pre-enunciative or pre-verbal and therefore belongs to the zone of buccality rather than the realm of orality; that might be said to stage a scene of writing in sleeping that is neither the symbolic inscription of the dream or its signifying transcription as dream-work, and hence, defies or resists analysis (including of the individual subject—ego sum) and therefore is the exposure to non-knowledge. In turn, as neither metonymy or metaphor, drool is not of the figure or the face, but is without-figure and is (self-) effacing; and in the elliptical or extended periodicity of its trace, can be thought of in terms of the spacing of the “with.” Drool is a pre-verbal stream that traces a path that flows towards nothing except consenting to the overflowing sense of bodies (Barthes’ “everyone”) and the inappropriability of their finitude, which is simply to say, the sovereignty of their fulfillment (comblement)—in love, thinking, adoration.

And as Nancy states in the short piece on Barthes that we have been quoting from, fulfillment is neither satisfaction nor saturation, either in the form of ferment or disgorging. Which in the context of our discussion we can take it to mean that drool, as one of the fluids by which the body is filled precisely to the extent that it remains inassimilable (non-fermented) and non-projected/expressed (disgorged), must be distinguished from both
saliva and spit. If we were to resort to a language of measure, we might say that drool is at once “more” than saliva, given that it is the very overflow of the latter, and “less” than spit, given that it is not violently expelled expression. In this way it is the “evidence” of extension and exteriority due to fulfillment rather than lack (the mouth’s filling up and overflowing of saliva), and an exposure to the outside that is at the same time withdrawal and retreat (unlike the projectile of spit). No wonder then, that while saliva and most especially spit/spittle have found a place in various theoretical, artistic, psychoanalytic and cultural discourses of bodily fluids, abjection, performance, obscenity, and subjectivity, drool has rarely been allowed to open—let alone trace—a path in the intellectual landscape.

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Sialorrhea, or drooling while sleeping (which is the scene that I am most interested in focusing on here), is a pre-enunciative and non-salvific salutation. As a certain salve but not a salvus (safe, saved), drool is one signal or salút/adieu (hello and goodbye, at once) of the fall of sleep as the fall of “self from absence to self,” as Nancy puts it in his book, The Fall of Sleep. In other words, falling asleep as the withdrawal or retreat of “I,” and an exposing of self to self that as “the opening opens behind me” is, as Nancy states in this book as well in the quote above, an anteriority that does not appear or is spoken, except in its withdrawal and retreat which is to say, its trace. Something like, Nancy writes, “a kind of grunt or sigh that escapes from barely parted lips. It is a preverbal stream that deposits on the pillow a barely visible trace, as if a little saliva had leaked out of that sleeping mouth.”

It is apparent that in this passage, Nancy is intervening in at least two related discourses, one Cartesian, the other Freudian, and because of this, my reading has necessarily led me back to several of Nancy’s earliest publications, namely, Ego Sum, his book on Descartes, and “Psyche,” his one-page essay on a posthumous note of Freud’s. The latter remains a constant point of reference for Nancy right up to the present, and indeed in the first volume of Corpus, he asserts that the note contains one of Freud’s most crucial statements. Freud’s note, which is dated August 22, 1938 (written just a bit more than a year before his death, and only published posthumously), reads: “Space may be the projection of the extension of the psychical apparatus. No other derivation is probable. Instead of Kant’s a priori determinants of our psychical apparatus. Psyche is extended; knows nothing about it.”

One of the many things about this statement that has drawn Nancy’s attention is the point about space as (the projection of) extension (of the psychical apparatus), which in turn echoes and is in tension with, Descartes’ res extensa (extended thing) as opposed to the thinking human subject as res cogitans (thinking thing). Obviously this is why the final line of Freud’s note appears in the final chapter of Nancy’s book on Descartes, the one titled “Unum Quid,” given that that chapter is a meditation on the mixed union of body and soul as presented in the Sixth Meditation (around 1640) as well as in a famous letter of Descartes’ to Elizabeth, in 1643, in which he most directly broaches the topic of the union of body and soul.

In 1978 Roland Barthes was delivering his lectures on “The Neutral” at the Collège de France, one of which featured a section on “Sleep” that is remarkably close in its theorization to Nancy’s own thinking as presented in his book The Fall of Sleep. Yet prior to Barthes’ lecture, in 1976 Sarah Kofman wrote a note that she classified as a “fragment of
analysis” that was also only published posthumously, and bears the title: “My Life’ and Psychoanalysis.” In it, Kofman theorizes the mouth of her body as not constricted to the domain of mastery and the self-enunciation of a logical narrative recounting of one’s life. Rather, the mouth is the place and source of surprise (e.g. “I can’t believe I just said that!” or, “What did you just say?!”). Drawing upon the metaphor of the cave, Kofman’s is a generous mouth, one that at the same time mimics the other erogenous zones of the body: penis (“spilling its offerings of semen”); and intestinal/anal (“Constipated”). So we read from this “fragment of analysis:"

"What my discourse had undoubtedly also wanted to dissimulate is that the mouth, at different moments of the analysis, can mimic the other erogenous zones of the body: that it can consecutively or simultaneously be mouth, sexual organ, anus. And not simply in an analogical manner: I knew that if, for instance, on a given day I was constipated, I would not be able to 'talk' on the couch either, that 'it' would not produce anything, that nothing would pass."\(^{15}\)

In the final chapter of Nancy’s book on Descartes, he locates the extension of exteriorized exposure that the body-soul union is, right at and on the mouth or bouche of the body. For Nancy (and for Sara Guyer and Peggy Kamuf, both of whom have written so beautifully on this chapter of Ego Sum), the mouth is the place of the subject in its exorbitance, which is to say, as that which at once exceeds and exists prior to enunciation. At once prior to, and in excess of speech (and phenomenon), this spacing, as Nancy has repeatedly pointed out, exceeds analysis, including the one dedicated to psyche. Who, as you recall, Freud tells us, lies outstretched and extended and knows nothing of this spaced-out exposure to what, drawing from Bataille, we can only call “non-knowledge.” Non-knowledge in the sense that Nancy himself has come to understand it, as: “the knowing which begins by articulating itself on the basis of its own abyss.”\(^{16}\)

Of course, this notion of the exteriority of the exorbitant subject being at once outside of and prior to the self, is found in Derrida’s book on Husserl, Speech and Phenomenon (1967)—which Nancy considers to be Derrida’s most interesting book and one that he has drawn from for many of his own principal notions and terms. Buried at the end of a long footnote in the chapter “The Voice that Keeps Silence,” Derrida writes in a formulation that is by now utterly familiar to us: “This being outside itself proper to time is its spacing: it is a proto-stage [archi-scene].”\(^{17}\) In other words, this anterior outside spacing is what I am calling the “fore-scene,” its own proto-stage or archi-scene, as the place and “origin of sense,”\(^{18}\) of which drool is the liquid fore-speech, the trace of this opening and retreat, irreducible to substance and to any of the various topologies of substance (structure, history, fiction, imaginary, symbolic, etc.). Drool is the evidence of this exorbitance of substance.

So not only is this not an ontologizing of the void, either as ground or unfulfilled end, it is also not about the empty but rather of emptying (kenosis) right at the overflowing (excessive, supplementing) edge and line—the retracing of this retreating, that requires us to de-ontologize existence and to speak less in terms of either being or becoming, but of existence as unbecoming. In other words: for the exposure that existence is, there is no schema, and this outside spacing borders not on the empty but instead can be said to be simply supported by nothing—no sufficient reason for, or principle of, existence. Just as we have learned to
question each figure of onto-theology and onto-typology, we must also continue to question every onto-topology, including each topology of substance.

So beyond even the figurality of the open in the form of the mouth, drool might be what Nancy describes as that “singular line that ‘fastens’ an existence, but that fastens it according to the complex graph of an opening, not returning to itself (‘self’ being this very non-return).”19 (In the context of our discussion, the word “fastens” is advantageous in its homonymous resonance with buckle/buccal of buccality). As we have noted, the “I” disappears in falling asleep that leads to self, from absence—of “I” and its enunciative capacity, in particular as captured by the impossibly of the sleeping self to say “I am asleep”—to self.

In chapter two of his book The Fall of Sleep, titled “I am falling asleep,” Nancy states that just as much as the I who sleeps cannot say (enunciate) “I am sleeping” (in a way similar to a subject not being able to say “I am dead” and still speak the truth), so too then is this “I” that sleeps not so much different from the “I” that is awake, but rather is the entire other of oneself in sleep—the one removed from all functions except sleep (hence: inoperative), yet occupying exactly the same place as the I who is now wholly “occupied” (i.e. not only some “part”) by sleeping.20 We might then say that drool is the trace of the impossible statement “I am asleep,” the pre- and post-enunciative overflow and retreat of the “I.” Drool is the outline of the path from the enunciation “I am falling asleep” to the fall of self from absence of self—the escape, withdrawal and vanishing of the “I.” Nancy formulates the latter quite simply, when he writes: “I fall asleep and at the same time I vanish as ‘I.’ I fall into myself and myself falls into self. It is no longer me, it is oneself, which does nothing but return to self.”21

In his brilliant reading of Nancy’s essay “The ‘There Is’ of Sexual Relation,” Jean-Paul Martinon engages in a close reading of two terms that Nancy places side-by-side, namely une survenue and une surprise. By scrutinizing this semantic doubling, instead of simply taking these words as synonymous, Martinon draws our attention to the overflowing bursts of sense (surprise) that erupt from out of sense’s syncopated rhythmic interruption (survenue). According to Martinon, survenue can be defined/translated and understood as syncopated interruption and supervening (as in “unexpected arrival”), chance coming, and more specifically, to-come excessively. Yet as he also argues, survenue, is the sustenance of existence, and the “means” by which existence subsists (irreducible to substance). Given this, we might say that sleeping—its fall—is the survenue or rhythmic interruption of existence that we “suffer” as existents. Pursuing our reading of Martinon a bit further, we might then say that sleeping—and perhaps especially sleeping without dreaming—is the suspension of the signifying and symbolic order in the overflowing of sense, and that drool, as the libidinal-linguistic excess of this overflowing fulfillment, is the burst and surprise of the survenue or fall of sleep.22

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As I wish to contend in this essay, to be in a relation of adoration to bodily fluids—to adore drool and drooling, for instance—is to bear a relation to the sovereign sense of existence that is perverse and queer to the precise extent that it does not know where those beings and bodies named human begin (or end). This is how Georges Bataille in his short essay...
“Mouth” marks the distinction between the “architecture” of “man” and animal, in which the mouth or “prow” as he says, is the beginning of the latter. As Barthes outlines in “Outcomes of the Text,” an essay primarily intended and devoted to Bataille’s own “The Big Toe,” yet touching upon “Mouth” as well, in which the “outcomes” of the title implies an interest in various forms of discharges and leaks, “For Bataille, the body begins nowhere, it is the space of anywhere; a meaning cannot be recognized in it except at the price of a violent operation: subjective-collective, meaning appears thanks to the intrusion of a value: noble and ignoble (top and bottom, hand and foot).”

Following what Barthes goes on to say about the paradigm of value, in my thinking and writing on drool, (and I would argue in any theoretical engagement with bodies and their fluids) I shall not operate via the Nietzschean paradigm of noble/base, but through the Bataillean three-part heterology of noble/ignoble and low. For as Barthes points out, the noble and ignoble together constitute what we might call a major discourse of value, of which queer theory might not even be immune when it operates simply through a logic of inversion, perhaps even in a hierarchization of bodily fluids. In other words, a queer theory of bodies and their fluids must not concern itself with the ignoble yet ultimately assimilable, but rather must attend to the unassimilable: that which is neither saliva (noble) nor spit (ignoble) but drool (low, bad). Such that following Barthes’ explanatory schema, we can say that as the third term, drool “is not regular...[it] is not the neutral term” (neither saliva nor spit), “nor is it the mixed term” (saliva and spit). Rather “it is an independent term, concrete, eccentric, irreducible: the term of seduction outside the (structural) law.”

The word drool is a noun and a verb. Etymologically speaking, the verb form was contracted from drivel, (a word that was in use as early as circa 1000 AD) and was related to slaver and dribble. From the late-14th-century, drool meant to talk childishly or idiotically, to talk nonsense. Drool only became used as a noun in the early-19th-century, to name not only spittle and nonsense, foolish or empty talk, but also to designate a certain kind of person, one who was inactive, slow—a sluggard. The French word for drool is bave (often translated as drivel). But as Peggy Kamuf has noted in her essay on Nancy’s philosophy of the gaping mouth, “Béance,” we might also consider the word bailer (to yawn, to gap, to gape), which shares the same source with the adjective béant (gaping), which in turn comes from the old French bayer, which further derives from the Gallo-Romano batare (to open the mouth). But as Kamuf notes, “one etymologist wonders whether the root of the verb is not the Gallic bait, which means stupid”—and thus semantically returns us to the English word drivel as the more-than-simply linguistic basis for the derivation but perhaps also the evaluation of drool.

So in addition to drool being seemingly trivial within the lexicon/anatomy of bodily fluids, to speak and write of drool is to run the risk of producing drivel about that which is taken to be trivial. But I would argue that it is precisely as that pre-verbal stream that is even less than a murmur, sigh or groan and that borders on an idiotic, stupid and nonsensical enunciation (i.e. drivel) and is the seemingly menial ephemera of a bodily fluid, that drool enables us to trace the place of the self/ego/I in its retreat from subjectivity, cognition, work and so on, along the extended periodicity and syncopated and seductive rhythm of which drool is not an evidentiary substance, but the pre-enunciative and sub-exposure of the incommensurable relation of body/soul/psyche, for which Nancy has given the name “corpus.”
Hence I believe that Michel Serres is not entirely correct when, in his recent book on appropriation, malfeasance, and the abjection of bodily fluids, he argues that the discharge and spatial extension of the latter, is the means by which space is appropriated as place, in terms of a laying claim to a place as one’s own by marking it with one’s own (improperly proper) excremental waste. For while this may be the case for most animals, it would seem to be different for that particular animal called human, which can sense and locate this impropriety (the abject, foreign, strange) within its own proper self. Obviously this does not do away with gestures of appropriation, but it does underline the extent to which such gestures will always remain incomplete, in their unavoidable exposure to an exteriorizing spacing that lies at their origin—the outside that is at the very heart of the cave. In other words, in their overflowing fulfillment, bodies are self-expropriating, and bodily fluids provide “substantial evidence” of this. To this we might add that art is the first and ongoing techno-aesthetic presentation of this self-expropriation. And further, that when this expropriating emission of drool, urine, semen and shit ceases, is when a corpus becomes a corpse. As Blanchot, Bataille, and Nancy have all argued, since the birth of man is marked and signalled by the birth of art, the end of art would be the end of man (homo aestheticus).

In his entry on “Spittle,” for his friend Bataille’s Critical Dictionary in the journal Documents, Michel Leiris divides his meditation into two parts: 1) Spittle-Soul, and 2) Mouth Water (L’eau à la bouche). In the latter, and in accord with Bataille’s own thinking, Leiris states that it is eroticism and its slight release that reveals “the true nature of a given organ” while abolishing hierarchies of a body’s different parts. Located below the head/eyes and above the organs of excretion, the mouth is described by Leiris as a “cave,” and “a moist and warm grotto” out of which as he goes on to say “Spittle [meaning here: spit]...casts the mouth in one fell swoop down to the last rung of the organic ladder, lending it a function of ejection even more repugnant than its role as gate through which one stuffs food.” Given that Leiris’ entry accompanied Bataille’s own on “formless,” in the same volume and issue of the Dictionary, we are not surprised to read that, “Spittle is finally, through its inconsistency, its indefinite contours, the relative imprecision of its colour, and its humidity, the very symbol of the formless, of the unverifiable, of the non-hierarchized.” Yet in doing so, I want to suggest that we might be encountering here not only a description of spittle/spit, but perhaps even more accurately and precisely, a description of drool. Except for the way in which as I have already suggested and will further elaborate, drool, as one of the tracings of the sense of existence, and of the extension and exposure, retreat and withdrawal that the self is, drool traces a non-signifying and hence non-symbolic sense (I do not doubt that Leiris would have disagreed).

Of even further interest for us—in that it provides a certain segue to our discussion of Nancy’s reading of Descartes—is the first part of Leiris’ entry: “Spittle-Soul.” Resorting now to “hive” as analogy for the mouth, “where the entrance hole glistens from the wax [saliva, spittle] inside,” Leiris here theorizes the cause of the humidity of this hive/cave/grotto as due to the “to and fro of the soul, which comes and goes in the form of breath” . Maintaining the duality of “mouth water” that we have been examining, Leiris then goes on to say that “Saliva is the deposit of the soul; spittle is the soul in movement,” to which we now add: drool is the trace of the soul’s extension right along the body, from body to body, and unlike the contractual capacity and function of saliva/spittle, drool can be thought of as
a non-consensual substance, in that it is not used (cannot be used) “to strengthen an action, for protection, to impress one’s will on an object, to ‘sign’ a contract, to give life.”

As mentioned earlier, since at least the late-1970s and his book on Descartes, *Ego Sum* (1979) and “Psyche” (1977), his one-page essay on one of the last notes written by Freud and posthumously published, in which Freud states “Psyche is extended, knows nothing of it,” Jean-Luc Nancy has time and again presented a thinking of the subject or the self defined in terms of an exterior, extended, and exposed spacing. In his reading of Descartes Meditations, the *res cogitans* of cognitive human consciousness is understood to be its own *res extensa*, or extended thing, and in his reading of Freud, the outstretched and extended spacing of the psyche is unmistakably also a body.

Further, while in that early study of Descartes, and its last chapter “Unim Quid,” Nancy located the incommensurable measure of the distinct union of soul and body at (and as) “la béance d’une bouche,” (the gaping of a mouth), such that the place of enunciation is to be understood as “la béance d’un non-lieu” (the gaping of a non-place) AND as the place that Psyche—including the psyché of Aristotle’s *De Anima*, as well as the Psyche of Freud’s posthumous note—opens in its animating force, it will not be until 30 years later in 2007 and the publication of his book on sleep, that Nancy will find in drool, an analogy and image, for that “something” that is neither “substance” nor “une topologie de la substance,” but is what in the Descartes book Nancy called the “sub-ex:” “quelque chose d’antérieur à tout ‘stade,’ à toute ‘station,’ ou ‘stance’ du sujet” (something anterior to every “stage,” every “standing,” or “stance” of the subject)—“l’incomplétude de sa substance.”

If as Nancy states, “Ego, c’est la prevue du subex,” then we might say that drool as sub-ex (far from substance) is the overflowing evidence that fulfills this proof, as it traces a path other than the –ject of subjectivity, objectivity, projection, rejection, introjection, and perhaps even abjection.

Substance has no extension, but is a dimensionless point. As extended liquid/saliva of the body, drool is that sub-ex of substance that affirms that a body is irreducible to substance. The nearly imperceptible stream of drool traces the extended periodicity of existence and the body’s infinite finitude—its exposure. This is existence’s elliptical—and hence overflowing—spacing and sense. This is beyond any *discourse* of bodily fluids (philosophical queer theoretical or other wise), but instead lies at the fore-scene of fore-speech, a preverbal opening or gaping of the mouth (*béance*), and thus an outside anterior to any intentional enunciation.

Drool is the soul of the body, of the body as always already outside itself (*ex corpore*), as something other than mass and pure substance. As Nancy writes: “in expelling, the body gives itself form” infinitely, and senses and feels it’s a (finite and self-separated) body. Another name for this sensing of the body is “soul,” and this mixture, tension, and union of body and soul, is the tensing, sensing and spacing of existence—the outline, trace of its being there—this body, here now in retreat. In a variation on Nancy: If I drool, it is a drooling soul.
However we note that Nancy demurred in his reference to drool from actually naming it as such, opting instead to describe (beautifully we must say) the trace of the retreat of “I am” in sleep as “a preverbal stream that deposits on the pillow a barely visible trace, as if a little saliva had leaked out of that sleeping mouth.” Yet just as we cannot mistake this trail of “a little saliva,” for anything other than drool, we also should not overlook the way in which Nancy here joins up his earlier philosophy of the mouth with his philosophy of sleep, and in this way opens up and enables to be revealed a whole series of gaps, gapes and openings through which drool passes: prior to enunciation, belonging to buccality as ex-onomy of the orality of the mouth, and of the mouth’s gaping (béance) more so than even its opening. As liquid fore-speech, drool is the fore-scene of non-knowledge and of what Barthes will call “neutral awakening,” at the limits of philosophical reason and analysis, or as Nancy put it: “en excès de toute psychanalyse.” At this point we might return to Leiris’ entry on spittle in order to ask, as he did:

Indeed, what value can we attach to reason, or for that matter to speech, and consequently to man’s presumed dignity, when we consider that, given the identical source of language and spittle, any philosophical discourse can legitimately be figured by the incongruous image of a sputtering orator?

Or, we might say, the not-so-incongruous image of the drooling mouth of a dreamless sleeper of reason.

Indeed what is obtained or to be gained by a philosophical or theoretical discourse that can be legitimately figured not only by the incongruous image of a spluttering orator, but by the not-so-incongruous—yet as we have already noted, remarkably elusive image (discursively speaking anyway) of the drooling mouth of a dreamless sleeper of reason? Perhaps not surprisingly, and based upon my reading of Nancy, I believe that there is much at stake here, including an image of thinking as incommensurable extension, and more precisely as the non-place of the taking place of what goes by the name of thought itself. All of this is contained and presented in what I, and others (e.g. Kamuf, Derrida) take to be the two principal passages of Nancy’s “Unum Quid” chapter of the Descartes book. The following quotations are Peggy Kamuf’s translations.

The incommensurable extension of thought is the opening of the mouth.
The mouth that opens and forms “ego” (other lips, already, had opened in order to bring into the world this “me,” when it wailed its first cry), this mouth is the place of the union [body and soul—my addition] inasmuch as the union opens and distends itself—and this is how the unum quid comes about. This place is not a place and yet it is not outside of all place. It forms within the place, within the extension of a face, the gaping [béance] of a non-place [non-lieu]. In this non-place, the figure (extension, measure) and the without-figure (thought without measure) are joined and distinguished, joined by their distinction. The place of enunciation [de l’enoncer] is formed by the internal dis-location of this reunion.

Inserting the language of my essay in-between brackets into this second quotation, we read:
The subject throws itself into this abyss. But ego is enunciated there [as fore-speech]; it is exteriorized there, which does not mean that it brings to the outside the visible face of an invisible interiority. It means literally that ego makes or makes itself exteriority, spacing of places, gap and strangeness that make up the place, and thus space itself, primary spatiality [fore-scene as archi-spacing] of a true tracing [drool] in which, and only in which, ego can come about, and trace itself, and think itself.\(^{48}\)

The ego drools, and drool traces the “there is” ego as the pre-enunciative path and stream, outstretched and extended. An exteriority anterior to place, and thus the very “spacing of places,” drool is the liquid fore-speech of the fore-scene. Drool traces the incommensurable distinction of the \textit{res cogitans} and \textit{res extensa}, the overflowing of the line or edge of the ego in and as its retreat—the very source of its sense. Drool is the inoperative use of the body’s organs and the leaving of impressions, yet not so much as thoughts as of the un-thought that is the “substance” and spacing of the relation between self and thought (sense)—a certain useless expenditure and exposure to non-knowledge as Nancy would say (imitating Bataille).

If, as Nancy argues, the realm of sleep is the simultaneity and coincidence of I and world, and the reduction of I to its own indistinctness, then perhaps drool is something of a line or mark of distinction in the midst, wake or fall of indistinction, yet without being the indelible mark of I (as subjectivity or identity), but rather of the singular plurality of self, which is to say, of the self’s infinitely finite exposure to the overflowing of sense. In other words, this is to argue that drool is a mark, trace, or outline of “the distinction of the indistinct,”\(^{49}\) the non-evidentiary evidence from a specific oscillation and syncope of ordinary life, namely drooling/falling asleep, as the \textit{quasi permixtio} of body and soul as \textit{unum quid}.\(^{50}\) To further clarify: I am not saying that drool is evidence/substance of the extension of the soul in and from out of the body, but is perhaps, following Nancy, evidence of “the extension of the unextended, through which the thing extended (or the body) is known in its union with the unextended…the unextended soul is given over to an extension that is improper to it [the improper propriety of drool and drooling], and its union with this impropriety is what it conceives without conceiving and what it conceives as inconceivable.”\(^{51}\)

Following Nancy, we might further suggest that drool is the trace of the overflowing of this immersion or conscious plunge of consciousness into unconsciousness and, as he says, “carries away any sort of analysis.” We might describe this as a certain Morpheus-inspired metamorphosis, “the outline of a fluidity,” and more specifically, as “the attestation of its retreat,” the appearing of the withdrawing and disappearing of self into self.

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As we have already noted, in the spring of 1978, that is, around the very same time that Nancy was publishing his first texts on the extended and exteriorized subject in Descartes’ \textit{Meditations} on the ego and Freud’s posthumous note on psyche, Roland Barthes was delivering his lectures on “The Neutral.” In the third session of the course (March 4, 1978) Barthes spoke on the topic of “Sleep.”\(^{52}\) As outlined in his lecture notes, Barthes theorized what he referred to as “the neutral awakening,” “the utopia of sleep,” and the relationship between “sleep, love, and benevolence.” In ways that will prove to be remarkably aligned with Nancy’s own philosophy of sleep, Barthes intervened in the discourse of psychoanalysis...
by prioritizing what we might call the worklessness of dreamless sleep over and against the idea of the dream as work. The theoretical premise operative in both Barthes and Nancy’s writing on sleep, is that there cannot be a phenomenological or psychoanalytic representation, knowledge or analysis of sleep, since, as we have discussed, sleep is the deferral of the subject, the fall of the self from absence to self. As Nancy states in The Fall of Sleep, sleep’s “fall is not a loss of consciousness but the conscious plunge of consciousness into unconsciousness, which it allows to rise up in itself as it sinks down into it. The truth of this immersion overflows and carries away any sort of analysis.”53 We have given the name drool to this overflow and truth.

For Barthes, “neutral awakening” is “suspended-time (= a definition of the Neutral as such)” a tense and tension that is “not perhaps between two worlds (dream ≠ awake) but between two bodies:” yet we might add: as the singularity of each and every body. Two bodies: one active, alert/living body (infinitely exposed), and the other, inactive/immortal/nearly dead body. The suspension between the two—the fall or exposed tension (their extension)—is part of what Nancy understands to be the fall of sleep.

Further for Barthes, neutral awakening is a mode of understanding; one that is slow, delicate and benevolent in its speed, tense, and affect—a suspended and what he at one point calls a “divine time”—perhaps even slower than critical or clinical time. As a mode of understanding, neutral awakening is the means of inferring and accessing what Barthes refers to as the “utopia of sleep.” Which is not only what we now recognize as the aporia of sleep, here defined by Barthes as “anticipated, fantasized as a happy state, but one we can only report about in a nonsleeping state: implies a divided consciousness cut off from speech.”54 It is also here, in this no-place place that Barthes’s utopia of sleep is also—like Nancy’s fall of sleep—“dreamless.”55

Or if not absolutely dreamless, then work-less. Sleep is an inoperativity, and if not an antagonistic resistance and refusal of the dream-work, then a retreat and withdrawal from the dream’s mytho-ideological productivity (poiesis), towards an unproductive transformation of the subject that is the very definition of praxis (as Nancy has reminded us). A praxis that Barthes recognizes and underlines as perverse, to the precise extent that it is a kind of unconditional expenditure, a “pervasive sleep,” with, we might add, drool as the pre-verse of this perversion.

Again as both Barthes and Nancy affirm, this perverse utopia and fall of sleep can never be solipsistic, but is that which is always shared. In other words, to sleep is always to sleep together (à deux—in which we must also hear a-dieu as the greeting at the point of encounter and departure).

At once an act of falling in love and the mobilization of trust, to sleep together here means to offer or to grant someone the chance to sleep, and not to be put to work—even (or especially) while sleeping. In his lecture, Barthes points to the stunningly beautiful French expression, dormer sur ses deux oreilles, that literally translated means “to sleep on two ears,” but which Barthes takes to mean “to sleep on the ear of the other and one’s own.” Meaning, not to sleep guardedly with one ear open, but to sleep so as if to create a parenthetical spatial cupping of one’s ear and an other’s; and to hear the “nothing” that stands or that is said between. It is in this way that “sleeping together” is the most intimate of intimacies—in
which on “the porches of our ears” Charlotte Mandel’s translation of Nancy’s phrase “au bord des oreilles”—there is the shared sense of the already unmade sense of sleep as that which cannot be felt, let alone represented and analyzed. An *exonomy of the eve* that is not so much the temporal-space “of” love, but rather of the act of falling in love, as though falling asleep, together-apart, and beyond any phenomenology of “act.” As Nancy beautifully describes it:

> Sleeping together comes down to sharing an inertia, an equal force that maintains the two bodies together, drifting like two narrow boats moving off to the same open sea, toward the same horizon always concealed afresh in mists whose indistinctness does not let dawn be distinguished from dusk, or sunset from sunrise.\(^{56}\)

This would be the sense of existence and the world that we all share, as sleepers, each and every one of us, belonging as we do, to “a common sleep, shared since unshareable.”\(^{57}\) Sleep is what we share in common in the sense of “the ontological impossibility of a common substance” (and principle). As liquidation of common substance, drool is the trace of this ontological impossibility—its elliptical sense. The body is the intruder and drool, like every other body fluid, is an index of this intrusion.

This scene of shared-separation is presented in photographic images created by two contemporary artists: Melanie Schiff, in her *Sleeping Boys* (2003), a series of three images in each of which a single young white male lies sleeping in a bed of white sheets against a neutral white background (Figure 1); and Felix Gonzalez-Torres in his photograph of an unmade bed (1991), with rustled sheets and two pillows both bearing the impressions of heads formerly present and now absent (Figure 2). Yet perhaps more precisely, of sleeping together as sharing in what cannot be shared that is not so much presented in either one or the other per se, but in the syncope of their juxtaposition and hence mutual exposure to each other. That is to say, as the appearance/disappearance of a body or bodies as though in a syncopated blink, wink or blackout of vision. For if, as Nancy states, sleep “shows itself to itself as this appearance that appears only as non-appearing, as returning all appearing on itself and in itself,” then the image of the unmade bed operates through an inoperative aesthetic praxis of what I have come to call the *already-unmade*.\(^{58}\)

The *already-unmade* is the name for an unbecoming art, praxis, technique and scene, the force of which in the context of our discussion of sleep, is not so much the unconscious (even though it shares with the unconscious the fact of being non-negative), nor the mechanism of repression, but rather is the force of retreat and withdrawal. It is the image/scene of the unmade bed that, quoting Nancy again, “allow[s] the waking phenomenologist [or psychoanalyst] approaching the bed to perceive nothing but the appearance of its [sleep’s] disappearance, the attestation of its retreat.”\(^{59}\) Drool is the tracing of this retreating, something like the erasure of the trace in the trace’s iterative re-tracing, the scene of which Freud staged for us in his “Note on the Mystic Writing Pad,” and that Robert Rauschenberg created in his *Erased De Kooning Drawing* (1953).\(^{60}\) This is what Nancy describes as “the blind task [tache, spot] of sleep” and what I want to suggest is also the blind task of art, and the singular pleasure of thought.
Figure 1

Figure 2
Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Untitled (bed billboard), 1991.
Drool is the liquidation of “substance,” and the “substantiality of an accident,” in which life is defined as a happy accident and surviving or living on as a happy surprise. It is in terms of this ontological insubstantiality, that life is further understood to be neither an “event” nor a “gift.” Sleep is what we share in common in the sense of “the ontological impossibility of a common substance” (and principle). As liquidation of common substance, drool is the trace of this ontological impossibility—its elliptical sense. The body is the intruder and drool, like every other body fluid, is an index of this intrusion—the burst and surprise of sense, its overflowing fulfillment.

As the liquid fore-speech of the fore-scene, we might say that drool is the pre-cum of a buccal murmur and groan, and imagine that with the lightest of touches, as though with the tap of a finger, this fluid is stretched out and extended, and in its extension (exposure without intention) traces the tenuous and fragile yet remarkably resilient tensile line of the “with” of our shared existence, body to body. As though at that sleeping mouth a non-salvific path was opened up by drooling, and in that fall of sleep that is at the same time the fall of speech, one hears the “with” of being-with or being-together. As exgested substance or more properly, as sub-ex, drool is a menstruum universal or “universal solvent” of sleeping together as being-together—everyone, fulfilled—co-somnum—beyond the double-binding violence of the subjective-collective. We drool therefore I am.

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Notes

2 This according to a footnote that states that, “The first version of this passage was written for a day of homage to Roland Barthes organized by Julia Kristeva in 2009, whose proceedings are to be published.” Ibid., 84-86.
3 “Meniscus” from the Greek ἡμῖνικος (crescent), and diminutive of ἡμῖν (moon), is the word that names and describes the crescent moon-shaped curved upper surface of a liquid in a tube, cup, glass or other such container.
4 This is also how Derrida reads Nancy’s thinking on the experience of the sublime, as when he writes: “the latter is also the experience of the border and of overflowing, the trembling apprehension of that which, touching on the border, at once goes overboard and remains at the border, holding out and holding back, retaining itself or abstaining, on the border.” Jacques Derrida, On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy, trans. Christine Irizarry, Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 109.
6 Nancy, Adoration: The Deconstruction of Christianity II: 84.
7 A scene where sleep (or in this case of “not sleeping”) and the mathematical analysis and measure of “the before and after” of a straight (rather than curved) line, is found in a
passage from Yves Bonnefoy’s book, *The Hinterland*, which Nancy quotes in his own book, *The Pleasure of Drawing*. The passage deserves to be quoted in full here: “Many years later, one day studying the unfolding of lemmata [subordinate propositions in a mathematical proof] neighboring Weierstrass’s theorem, which states the notion of point and of the before and after on a straight line, I was suddenly overwhelmed by a sort of objectless exaltation, where there was joy, sadness, and suddenly I saw myself, lying on a bench, face on a folded jacket, trying to sleep but not sleeping. The obsession with the shared point of divide [point de partage] between two spaces, two influxes, had marked me from childhood and still does. And certainly, because it is more a mythical than terrestrial space, at the articulation of transcendence.” Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Pleasure of Drawing*, trans. Philip Armstrong (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 58.

As we shall see, all of this along with his thin king and writing on: corpus, enunciation, sleep, touch and non-knowledge.


Ibid., 85.


Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*: 5. “Inoperative:” in the sense that Nancy has appropriated the term désœuvre (idleness, worklessness) from Maurice Blanchot, I use the term here to underline the essential worklessness of sleep, especially sleeping without dreaming which is also to say, without working, at least in terms of the Freudian theoretical idiom of “dream-work.” See below for a further elaboration of this argument.

Ibid., 11.
25 Ibid., 246. We note that while inclined to refer to spit and spittle—which he classified as low—I have yet to find a text in which Bataille speaks of drool.
30 Ibid., 79.
31 Ibid., 80.
32 Ibid.
33 Georges Bataille, Documents, Volume 1, Number 7, 1929.
34 Bataille et al., Encyclopaedia Acephalica: comprising the Critical dictionary & related texts, 80.
35 Ibid., 79.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Nancy, Ego Sum: 151.
40 Ibid., 160.
41 Ibid., 152.
42 Ibid., 155. Conceiving of drool as that substance that traces the distinction of the originary, primary, or fore-spacing of the union of soul and body or as Nancy says “consubstantial,” at the same time means defining drool more precisely as “pre-substantial, anterior and exterior to the position of substances and their correlative distinction.” Ibid., 147, my translation.
43 "On the Soul" in, Nancy, Corpus: 127.
44 "The Extension of the Soul" in,ibid., 144. There Nancy writes: “The soul is exposed there [along the body’s extension] in a proper modality of extension and marries the impulse of the body: if I walk, it’s a walking soul; if I sleep, a sleeping soul; if I eat, an eating soul.”
45 Nancy, Ego Sum: 161.
48 Ibid., 52. Nancy’s emphasis.
50 On the mixed union of body and soul, see Descartes’ Sixth Meditation (81), where he writes: “Nature also teaches me, by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst and so on, that I am not merely present in my body as a sailor is present in a ship, but I am very closely joined and, as it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit.” René Descartes,

51 Nancy, Corpus: 139.
53 Nancy, The Fall of Sleep: 8, emphasis added.
54 Barthes, The Neutral: 37.

55 I read in the following passage from The Fall of Sleep, a definition of what we might call the fore-sleep of sleep (its anteriority or “antecedence”): “We fall from sleep into sleep: sleep is itself a force that precedes itself and carries its power forward into its action. If I’m falling asleep, it’s because already sleep has begun to take control of me and invade me even before I sleep, before I’ve begun to fall.” Nancy, The Fall of Sleep: 3. This echoes a passage from Descartes’ First Mediation, where he writes: “I see plainly that there are never any sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep. The result is that I begin to feel dazed, and this very feeling only reinforces the notion that I may be asleep.” Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy: 13.
56 Nancy, The Fall of Sleep: 19.
57 Ibid., 45.
61 Ibid., 141.
62 In describing drool as the pre-cum of buccality, the outside and futurity (spatial and temporal opening) are understood as the provenance of speech and enunciation, and drool once again is more than simply metaphorically conceptualized. For given that the Latin root of the word provenance (its provenance) translates as forth (pro) + come (venire), drool as pre-cum can be said to trace a forth-coming futurity and fore-coming outside, neither of which are either initial or destinal, but a forth and a fore anterior to any origin or end, including even to any “pre-coming.” Such is the anarchic and a-telic scene opened up by drool and pre-cum.
63 Here we take Nancy’s notion of a “tension without intention” to mean both non-phenomenological, as well as absent of desire as that which is predicated upon a notion of “lack” (value calculated as “not enough”).
64 Nancy’s term for the deconstruction of the relation between enunciation and substance, that structures the Cartesian figuration of the subject.