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Regarding the ear in Raymond Carver's "Vitamins"

Vasiliki Fachard

Part I

- 1 "I could see the smallest things," says the female narrator in the story of the same title, "the clothespins on the line, for instance" (*What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*). She thus echoes a self-reflexive Carver who could fix his own "regard" on the sub-mimetic activity, the *infiniment petit* of the sub-conscious forces he glimpsed under the "smooth (but sometimes broken) surface of things" (*Fires* 17). The hypogean slugs which the narrator's neighbor digs up at night and which disfigure the lawn are no less metonymic of a sub-liminal life that "twists this way and that" before it is brought to the mimetic order of his stories: "The slug was twisting this way and that. Then it curled and straightened out." It is that infra-zone below the surface that solicits Carver's gaze as it simultaneously makes him steer clear of nineteenth-century realism—with its eye on reality as it appeared.
- 2 Such shifting of narrative territory points to the very direct link between Carver's penetration into the hypo-mimetic forces in narrative and the physicist's "penetration into the world of atoms, hitherto closed to the eyes of man..." (Bohr 24). Whether talking about physical matter or the "material" of his stories, the real in both remains fissured rather than whole, discontinuous rather than homogeneous, pulverized into the quanta or particles of a relentless combinatory process rather than fixed or monolithic. Inextricable from an Einsteinian universe as the singularity of Carver's voice and vision appeared to us, we could not but be drawn to the following statement made by one with no less insight into his fiction than the poet Tess Gallagher, Carver's wife:

Carver's stories had the kind of impact on American fiction that Einstein's theory of relativity had on science. We couldn't quite fathom how it worked, but it changed the way we regarded the lives of middle-class working people. They were at last

given full dignity. Their suffering was made emotionally palpable, for Carver was first of all a poet. (104)

- 3 Unlike Tess Gallagher, however, we did not see the connection between the two men in the analogous impact each had in his respective field, clean of any contagion from the space of one to the other, but rather in the impact of the physicist *on* the writer, the fact that Carver had been 'infected' by the vision of reality Einstein's discovery had revealed to all—but which all do not always integrate in the same space of time. Whether conscious or unconscious, his appropriation of that vision turns the physicist into one among the plethora of "influences [as] forces" which Carver is compelled to acknowledge as unknown even to himself in the opening lines of "Fires":

Influences are forces—circumstances, personalities, irresistible as the tide. I can't talk about books or writers who might have influenced me. That kind of influence, literary influence, is hard for me to pin down with any kind of certainty. (19)

- 4 Not being a "literary influence" Einstein is no less a "force" whose "impact" is made palpable in a granulated fiction of parts—stories as parts of a larger sequence aspiring toward a molecular monument such as "Cathedral"—which the narrator of "Fat" warns us about when she says: "Now that's part of it. I think that is really part of it...but that is not the whole story." 'In fact, there is never a whole story in Carver, a monolithic narrative whose parts cannot be de-composed by a reader in the making of his/her story as another "process" through which Carver manages to engage the "reader's own artistic sense" (*Fires* 16).

- 5 If Carver's assimilation of the theory of relativity, however, changed the way he "regarded" his own narrative material and mechanics, we were initially far from able to see how—or if—his impact on fiction also "changed the way we regarded the lives of middle-class working people." The above seemed all the more questionable in light of Carver's own answer to the question whether his "stories will affect people [and whether] his writing will change anybody":

No. I don't believe for a minute in that absurd Shellyan nonsense having to do with poets as the 'unacknowledged legislators' of this world...The days are gone, if they were ever with us, when a novel or a play or a book of poems could change people's ideas about the world they live in or about themselves." (*Fires* 215)

- 6 Even more dubious, however, sounded Tess Gallagher's assertion that "working-class people...were at last given full dignity"—analogous to saying that Zola's writing about the Rougon-Macquart gave them "full dignity," or that writing about any social class brings with it an unquestioning regard and validation of their lives. Similarly, a reader would be hard put in Carver to find "dignity" in a character such as the male narrator of "Vitamins" (*Cathedral*) who opens the story thus:

I had a job and Patti didn't. I worked a few hours a night for the hospital. It was a nothing job. I did some work, signed the card for eight hours, went drinking with the nurses. After a while, Patti wanted a job. She said she needed a job for her self-respect. So she started selling multiple vitamins door to door.

- 7 Making no demands on his own job, he can hardly be expected to understand why his wife "needed a job for her self-respect," any more than he can know that a big part of that self-respect begins in the relation he has with her, one in which he reduces her to the sole function of satisfying his own needs, themselves reduced to the sexual. Thus, when Donna, Patti's friend and co-worker whom he seduces in the course of a party at their house, put a temporary stop to his advances by saying "Not now," he "figured it

was money in the bank" and soon "headed for the bedroom" to satisfy his lust on a sleeping wife:

I thought some more about Donna. I finished the drink. I took the phone off the hook and headed for the bedroom. I took off my clothes and got in next to Patti. I lay for a while, winding down. Then I started in. But she didn't wake up. Afterwards, I closed my eyes.

- 8 When some days later he finds Donna waiting for him outside the hospital where he works, they head for a "spade place" he knows and resume where they had left off. They are soon interrupted, however, when "this spade named Benny" joins their table and introduces them to Nelson, "this big, dressed-up spade" who had just come back from Vietnam that very day. Fresh from the war, with hardly time to adjust to domestic or civilian life, Nelson is seething with raw, untempered aggressivity which does not take long to unleash itself against the narrator, whose illicit affair with Donna insenses him: "You with somebody else, ain't you? This beautiful woman, she ain't your wife. I know that."
- 9 Morally indignant at one who was indulging his sensuality while he was fighting both men's war, Nelson will provoke the narrator by harrassing Donna, whom he asks to perform fellatio on him for money. Rather than coming to her defense, as we might expect, her partner is paralyzed with fear of Nelson's menacing presence as he admits: "I couldn't taste the whiskey. I couldn't taste anything" or, "My legs were crazy." As strategy, the black man has thus literally pointed his weapon ("spade" from *spada*, 'sword') to a most vulnerable spot in his adversary: a wanting virility, which in Nelson's mind is synonymous with aggressivity. Nelson is thus diametrically opposed to the narrator, who equates virility with seduction, a strategy in which a woman—what *Donna* means in Italian—is turned into an object.
- 10 The single pursuit of his own pleasure in that object, however, has not only deprived his senses of the capacity to respond to Donna's present call of distress. It has anesthetized them against similar events or situations that are not uniquely a source of pleasure, be they as seismic as a war: "Is all that shit about Vietnam true we see on the TV?" Such unconsciousness to the war's reality is no different from his deafness to Donna's needs, or from his incapacity to capture the alarming signals of a wife without a job or "self-respect." They all reflect an asthenic character, deprived of the *tonus* or tension that a dynamic relation with the other could bring it, if only he could hear that other's needs. In his deafness, consequently, he has sapped rather than vitalized the core of his own Masculinity, a deficiency Patti unconsciously diagnosed when she decided to sell vitamins for her (and his) "self-respect." By relating minimally to the two women, the narrator has atrophied the other senses of his body as well, stripping them of the capacity to respond to stimuli that inaugurate the dialog with the outside world which alone dynamises being and wards off the threat of autism.
- 11 Hearing, according to the ear specialist Tomatis, is one such primordial sense through which "the dialogue with the environment, with the other, with the world, with the surroundings, will, little by little, be structured" (25)—hearing as that "irresistible force of attraction, of gravitation, which pulls man toward his becoming" (24). The above may throw some light on the significance of the object Nelson feels for in his pockets as he is simultaneously making his proposal to Donna: a "dried-up ear" he has brought back from Vietnam. If her partner cannot defend her, it may be telling her, it is because there is a connection between his wanting virility—what Nelson sees as the

emasculatation of his body—or tonicity it lacks and his sense of hearing or capacity to capture the vibrating tones or sounds through which stimuli from the outside world penetrate to activate his being. That connection is made explicit by the comment Benny makes when his eye also takes in the ear: "I heard about these dried-up ears and dicks and such." The discourse contained in the dead ear and to which Nelson expects a response will escape Donna, however, who appears to merely answer his earlier proposition or univocal question:

'Ain't that something?' Nelson said. He was watching Donna.

'No way. Fuck off,' Donna said.

- 12 Unable to articulate the significance of the dysfunctioning organ, Donna may, nevertheless, be feeling the silent impact of its haunting presence on her new rapport with the narrator after they manage to leave the "spade place" and get in the car. Drained of all desire, "Donna stayed over on her side," while the narrator's own earlier desire to "go to her place and finish things," appears to be no less irrevocably extinguished: "I didn't want to touch Donna. The hug we'd given each other in my kitchen that night, the kissing we'd done at the Off-Broadway, that was all over."
- 13 Related to the fear and humiliation they were subjected to, the ear may have played its part in deterring them from their adulterous act, as it may have also worked its "spell" in compelling Donna to confess a more devastating truth about herself: "I could of used the money. It's true...I could of used the money." It is the light of that truth she recoils from when she flinches from the "overhead light [that] came on" when the narrator opened the door: "For Christ's sake, turn off that light!"
- 14 Yet, it was precisely as a harlot, we recall, that her partner had seen her earlier in the kitchen, when he had thought of the playful resistance in her "not now" as "money in the bank," even before Nelson suggested the same by placing his wallet next to the ear on the table. By their relation to each other (Donna's consenting to the function he assigns her), consequently, both have reduced their act to its carnality, both are accomplices in stripping it of all transcendence. If Donna, therefore, as her name also suggests (*don* 'gift', from *donner* 'to give') has given herself to him wantonly, he is no less responsible for driving her to that extreme through what he also confesses to be an indifference to any other dimension in her life: "I said, 'What are you going to do?' But I didn't care. Right then she could have died of a heart attack and it wouldn't have meant anything."
- 15 Donna has ceased to exist for him, in other words, the moment she does not fulfil the sole function he assigns to a Woman. If Nelson, consequently, debases Donna now through his proposition, the white man had, before him, reduced her to a sexual object or harlotry himself through a relation which helped to deprive her of what he deprives his wife: "self-respect."
- 16 Nor are the two women alone in being deprived of what results from his non-recognition of needs other than sexual. Sheila, another girl at the aforementioned party, was treated with no less lack of feeling after she "passed out drunk": "Patti and I and somebody else lugged her out to the back porch and put her down on a cot and did what we could to forget about her." When Sheila woke up with a broken finger "she wanted to know didn't anybody give a shit." As he sees her cry over the sink, he will actually justify his lack of sympathy: "But she'd made a serious pass at Patti, a declaration of love, and I didn't have any sympathy."

- 17 Through a sexual preference she had expressed earlier to Patti, Sheila had made clear her refusal to serve the sole function that would connect her with the narrator-protagonist. In the face of such noncompliance, his apathy does not take long to turn to antipathy, as it does the moment she refuses to let him drive her to the hospital rather than wake Patti—a concern he will conveniently forget when he will presently join the wife in bed in order to satisfy his own needs:

'I'll drive you,' I said...

'I want Patti to drive me,' Sheila said... 'Besides, we *need* to talk. I *need* to tell her

I'm going to Portland. I *need* to say goodbye."

I said, 'I guess I'll have to tell her for you She's asleep.'

...'I won't ride with you!', Sheila yelled.

'Suit yourself. But you're not going to wake Patti. *Lesbo bitch*,' I said.

'*Bastard*,' she said. (emphasis added)

- 18 In its restorative or therapeutic function the hospital where he works is a constant reminder throughout the story of the "dis-ease" in the girls' life and the possible cure he could provide. Such a cure is connected to the *function* the women *serve* (or not), thus cohering with the double meaning of *θεραπεία*, from which 'therapy' is derived: 'to serve' or 'to cure'. Sheila rejects outright to be driven by him to such a place as Donna actually seeks him out in. In an ironic twist, the name of the latter also means 'lady', a title that confers "dignity" as it simultaneously evokes the religious 'Lady of Grace'. Far from helping Donna achieve such status, the narrator will take her from the hospital to the Off-Broadway, where he will precipitate her dis-grace ("The Off-Broadway is where I took Donna on our date. It was the one date we ever had").
- 19 In contrast to Donna, therefore, She-i-la does not see any therapy or solution to her problems by serving the function he assigns to her sex. The scriptural components of *her* name ('la' being the feminine article in both French and Italian) point to her desire to exclude any masculine presence in the She-I-la "core group" she forms with Donna and Patti. Sheila's severing (rather than giving) herself from him is the option she chooses when confronted with a male of his kind. The name-calling they exchange has thus polarized her from him as it has also polarized the two women into one that says 'yes' and another that says 'no' to his demands.
- 20 To the above same male Patti's relation is defined as in-between: she "let him kiss her," as she lets him fulfil his lust on her while she is asleep. In her passivity, Patti is apparently content with an occasional 'pat' of fondness (as hollow as his desultory use and repetition of "honey" in the dialogs she fails to engage him in) as to a pet, performing her uxorial function and thus remaining connected to him through the thinnest thread of wifely role-playing.
- 21 If the three women, finally, differ in how they confront his inability to see them as anything but objects, they simultaneously interlock with each other as one Woman (*donna*) in their relation to him, irrespective of the different role each one 'chooses' in his presence. Partly for this, the narrator has no name: the women respond solely to the male-ness in him (as he to their female-ness), a dimension that the narrative isolates even more by making him the only male in their female space. In fact, before his confrontation with Nelson, the narrator is never presented in the company of men. From the "nurses" he "went drinking with," to the "girls" who were "put to work under" the more conscientious Patti and are forever changing, "there was," in his own words, "no end of girls." Beyond his own workplace and Patti's, he also basks in their exclusive company during his time of leisure: "I was the only fellow at the party, and

there were seven girls, six of them dancing with each other. It was great just looking around the living room."

- 22 Following their experience with him, both Sheila and Donna will leave Patti for Portland to look for, we presume, other harbors of affectivity and sources of "self-respect." Only the wife remains attached to him, as to an anchor in her sea of troubles with the girls who don't "stick" with the vitamin business:

But the girls who worked for her were always changing. Some would quit after a couple of days—after a couple of hours, sometimes...The girls who couldn't cut it would just quit. Just not show up for work. If they had a phone, they'd take it off the hook. They wouldn't answer the door. Patti took these losses to heart, like the girls were new converts who had lost their way. She blamed herself...Sometimes a girl just disappeared in the field, sample case and all. She'd hitch a ride into town, then beat it. But there were always girls to take her place. Girls were coming and going in those days.

- 23 In so far as they work "under her," the endless number of girls are also extensions of her multiple self, their constant flux externalizing her own inner instability, as if dramatizing the aria *la donna è mobile* through their incessant coming and going. Taking their "losses to heart" and seeing them as converts simultaneously points to them as being somehow connected to her own spiritual quest for the right "way," their constant drifting and fluidity of movement allowing her no peace and no fixed "port" for the structuration of her being—wherein self-respect also resides.

- 24 Closer to her than all the un-named girls are Sheila and Donna, the "core group" that is vital for her own "core" ('heart') or interiority. Managing to keep that antithetical couple from going to Portland—as they menace to do—is synonymous with keeping herself from dissolution. In so far as each also incarnates a diametrically opposed propensity in her feminine self vis-à-vis the man in her life, maintaining the "core group" means holding the marriage together—by not resorting to the options of Sheila and Donna. In her frantic attempt to succeed by drawing his participation in her effort as well, however, Patti only finds a deaf ear in her husband:

'Ground zero. Middle of winter, people sick all over the state, people dying, and nobody thinks they need vitamins. I'm sick as hell myself.'

'What's wrong, honey?' I put the drinks on the table and sat down. She went on like I hadn't said anything. Maybe I hadn't.

'I'm my only customer,' she said. 'I think taking all these vitamins is doing something to my skin. Does my skin look okay to you? Can a person get overdosed on vitamins?...

'Honey,' I said.

Patti said, 'You don't care if I take vitamins. That's the point. You don't care about anything.'

- 25 It is through the metaphor of vitamins, finally, that the three women of the "core group" interpenetrate and fuse into one (broken) Woman, *vita-mins* as the vitalizing, life-sustaining forces he cannot help her (them) find. Through his deafness, furthermore, the narrator of her (their) story is subverting her (their) search for a stable center, his reductionist vision of her (their) function making him collude with the forces that pulverize the unity or potential "core" Patti strives to hold together. Thus, when Sheila insists on being loyal to her friend Patti by telling her goodbye before quitting, the husband prevents her, insensitive to or, possibly, jealous of the genuine sense of friendship and loyalty Sheila can give—in opposition to himself—to his own

wife. In the case of Donna, he actually connives with her against the wife in his desire to seduce her:

'Patti's my friend,' she said.

'She's my friend, too' I said...

'I hate to do this to Patti. She's my best friend, and she's trying to build things up for us. But I may have to quit. This is between us. Swear it! But I have to eat... Vitamins can't cut it... I don't think vitamins is where it's at anymore...'

Donna laid her hand next to my leg. I reached down and squeezed her fingers. She squeezed back.

'Worse than anything, I hate to let Patti down. You know what I'm saying? We were a team.'

- 26 Interconnected through their work, the team of Patti, Sheila and Donna ensomatizes a femininity of parts: by touching one he touches the whole. They are three "negative" reactions (Patti and he talk of "negative weather") to a male presence when that presence turns to absence, cowardice, perfidy, or incapacity to reach the "core" of their existence and thus sustain them in their one common search for "self-respect." Rather than being a catalyst in synergizing the forces within Patti into a hard-core center, the man atomizes and sends them off in negative directions. By undermining the wife's desperate effort to hold the "team" together he has, in short, wreaked havoc on the "core" of womanhood (hers/theirs).
- 27 Simultaneously, however, he has also shaken the other end of the male/female polarity which forms the matrix of the story, an axis of forces which he must activate in the forging of his self. A similar havoc, in other words, awaits his own masculinity at the end of the story, wrought upon him by the pugnacious figure of Nelson who, in the pugilistic metaphor, will literally have him 'in a nelson' before he lets him and Donna go. What makes Nelson's menace so powerful is a concentration of male forces—precisely the ones the narrator has become deaf and blind to in himself. Unleashed against him in the manner of the antique Furies, they will now demand to be heard—through the black man's voice.
- 28 In so far as he equates male-ness with aggressivity, Nelson is antipodal to Donna's female-ness as passive abandonment or yielding of her body to the narrator's lust. He is not, however, any more uni-polar in his incarnation of male-hood than was Donna in her femininity. Along with Khaki and Benny, Nelson is also part of a triad of black men the narrator will confront inside the Off-Broadway but whose menacing presence is already being foreshadowed by an un-named threesome he and Donna first see outside the "spade place" they are about to enter: "Three spades were up against an old Chrysler that had a cracked windshield. They were just lounging, passing a bottle in a sack. They looked us over." In their absence of names they are juxtaposed to (in order to ultimately oppose) the "girls" who were "coming and going" in Patti's business, the shiftiness or flight of the latter opposed to the erectness and fixedness of the "three spades" (whether seen as digging instruments or weapons). To one who is used to the company of women, furthermore, the above trio signals danger and violence rather than company he can safely indulge his senses in.
- 29 As the three women define their femininity in relation to the narrator—from total abstinence to total yielding—the three black men will depict masculinity through a similar tri-ptych: each panel or 'fold' (πτυχῆ) revealing a stance in relation to the aggressive instinct at its "core." At the center of that oscillating axis is the narrator, who must forge his identity through the appropriation of both feminine and masculine

forces. At the other extreme of Donna, therefore, is Nelson, whose aggressivity is described as nothing less than predatory: "This big spade had little red eyes...He seemed to want to place me from somewhere. He studied me. Then he let loose a rolling grin that showed his teeth." As two strokes of a painting, the red eyes and Nelson's show of teeth project the narrator's fear on what appears to him as a 'picture' of a preying animal. Contrasted to one who has just come back from Vietnam that same day and whose aggressive instinct has not yet undergone domestication is a 'picture' of himself as its opposite: a domestic animal.

- 30 If part of the narrator, however, needs an undiluted dose or a strong image of maleness such as Nelson provides, another part also needs a counter-force that checks the destructiveness of the aggressive impulse—precisely the function Khaki serves:

Khaki was a big spade with a bald head that lit up weird under the fluorescents. He wore Hawaiian shirts that hung over his pants. I think he carried something inside his waistband. At least a sap, maybe. If somebody started to get out of line, Khaki would go over to where it was beginning. He'd rest his big hand on the party's shoulder and say a few words and that was that.

- 31 Seen as a "big spade" with a weapon in his waistband, Khaki is physically no less menacing than Nelson, no less bellicose, as his name suggests. If his eyes are just as penetrating or predatory, however, he knows when to avert them from his prey: "I thought Khaki looked right at me—but if he did, he looked away again." Khaki knows, in other words, when things "get out of line," as they do when the polar opposites of Nelson and the white man come together, and is there to prevent the disastrous effects of their collision:

Khaki had a hand on my shoulder and the other one on Benny's shoulder. He leaned over the table, his head shining under the lights. 'How you folks? You all having fun?'

'Everything all right, Khaki,' Benny said. 'Everything A-okay. These people here was just fixing to leave. Me and Nelson going to sit and listen to the music...'

Nelson just got off the plane from Nam this morning,' I heard Benny say. 'We been drinking all day. This been the longest day on record. But me and him, we going to be fine, Khaki.'

- 32 As his name indicates, Benny (Benjamin) is the 'youngest' of the three in terms of aggressivity (attenuated rather than exhibited in the story) and thus represents a 'softer' version of virility. Appropriately, therefore, Khaki's hand on the shoulder of both men designates him to serve as link between the narrator and the triarchy of black men. While Khaki protects the white man from the potential violence in Nelson, Benny mollifies the latter by saying such things as: "Nelson,...this is no way to talk, Nelson," or "Nelson, let's leave these people be." If Nelson makes a cult of aggressivity-as-virility, Benny can cultivate other interests and 'soft' things such as music: "Benny stuck out his hand for a brother handshake. Benny and I had talked. He knew I liked the music, and he used to come over to talk whenever we were both in the place." Surprisingly, Khaki also reserves a friendly welcome for the narrator, who is, in turn, pleased and flattered by it: "I'd be going there off and on for months. I was pleased that he'd say things to me, things like, 'How're you doing tonight, friend?' Or, 'Friend, I haven't seen you for a spell'" (emphasis added).

- 33 Underneath their intimidating presence, in other words, the men are also receiving him into a brother-hood or fraternity of sorts in which they will confront him with the image of man-hood he needs: "How's my man?" said Benny." In their varying attempts to come to terms with the aggressive instinct, the three men form a single triad of

"spades." As such, they are contrapuntally opposed to Patti-Donna-Sheila. Counterpoised to them—with the narrator at the center of the male/female axis—they signify a force which must pull him away from the three "girls."

- 34 We soon realize that the paralyzing fear the narrator feels in his legs or general numbness of his body in the men's presence is a necessary part of the initiation ritual he needs to go through if he is to appropriate a similar manly status. At the darkest, innermost core of their trinity is Nelson, functioning as a hierarch. The torrent of obscenities, the money offered to Donna and to her escort are part of the humiliation the narrator must undergo if he is to walk out of the black tunnel into which he has brought his life. A necessary phase before any appropriation of male-ness, any exorcising of the "spell" cast on him by his exclusive entourage of women, is also the powerlessness he feels in front of Nelson:

'Hell, here another hundred for your good friend, so he won't feel left out. He don't have to do nothing.' 'You don't have to do nothing,' Nelson said to me. 'You just sit there and drink your drink and listen to the music. Good music. Me and this woman walk out together like good friends. And she walk back in by herself. Won't be long, she be back.'

- 35 Central to the ritual in which the three men officiate is the relic of the ear, ceremonially presented in a "silver case." It is the sacramental object whose mystery the narrator must penetrate: if he is to learn about "girls," the first thing he must learn is to lend them his ear. Only thus will they be transformed into women and he, in turn, into a man. Only thus will the name Donna re-connect with the positive attributes of her name (woman, grace, lady, gift) and yield herself to him not as a harlot but in the myriad moving parts of her feminine complexity. In brief, the narrator will be initiated to the dynamics of the male/female polarity, a transformational process in which his relation to himself as subject is inseparable from the same relation to woman as subject as well.
- 36 Without activating the above polarity there is no structuring of the subject and no "being," which, according to Deleuze proceeds from a "labyrinth" such as the ear canal: *L'oreille est labyrinthique, l'oreille est le labyrinthe du devenir ou le dédale de l'affirmation. Le labyrinthe est ce qui nous amène à l'être...il n'y a d'être que du labyrinthe lui-même*, "the ear is labyrinthine, the ear is the labyrinth of being...there is no being but in the labyrinth itself" (216)³. It is through the ear, finally, that we experience *l'intériorité de l'objet devenant...celle du sujet*, "the interiority of the object becoming...that of the subject" according to Derrida (23).
- 37 For the present, if the narrator has ears, they are as dysfunctional as the one Nelson "took...off one of them gooks [who] couldn't hear nothing with it no more." For he can hardly hear with his ear either, being no more tuned to the other—à *l'écoute de l'autre*—than a dead person, as Patti well knows: "Nobody's buying vitamins. That's what I'm telling you. Didn't you hear me?"
- 38 It was above all that disconnection from others in her partner that Nelson wished to warn Donna about when he first showed her the ear that "sat on a bed of cotton." In an analogous 'soft' environment—he was trying to tell her—her partner indulges his sensuality, while men like himself fight in Vietnam. Removed from the battles of the war, he is just as detached from or unconscious of its devastating reality here at home when he asks, "Is all that shit about Vietnam true we see on the TV?" Deaf and blind to that reality, he is hardly expected to defend Donna here, whose signs of distress he

cannot capture any more than he can those of Sheila when his ear cannot capture that "inner tremor of the body" that simultaneously transcends the purely somatic: *L'oreille...sans se tourner pratiquement vers les objets, perçoit le résultat de ce tremblement intérieur du corps par lequel se manifeste et se révèle, non la figure matérielle mais une première idéalité venant de l'âme*, "The ear...without turning in practice toward the objects, perceives the result of that inner tremor of the body through which manifests and reveals itself not the material figure but a first ideality coming from the soul" (Derrida 296).

39 Only in the process and movement of aspiring to ultimately reach that "ideality" or "soul" with Donna (Woman), of desiring to penetrate into the other's subjectivity, can the narrator's sexuality ward off the menace of withering like the dead soldier's ear. For, as Benny intimated when he associated "dried-up ears and dicks and such," both functions are connected. Both feed on sensory stimulation from without, on the *va-et-vient* of communication which alone permits to orchestrate that higher reality in which the two sexes dynamise and transform rather than deaden each other. What Nelson has touched in the narrator, in other words, is nothing less vital or central to his very *raison d'être*—his being—than the "core" of his sexuality. He has dealt it such a devastating blow that it made it shrivel in Donna's presence as well, ironically when they were at last free to consummate their act.

40 More odious, therefore, than the adultery he did not commit against a wife is the narrator's unresponsiveness to the Woman (*donna*) whose "self-respect" Nelson deliberately violated in his very presence. It was responsible for the paralysis of his own body, ultimately making it inert. The association between the two vital organs—"ears and dicks and such"—tells us something about their contingency, something about emasculation (real as well as metaphorical) as being the menace that hangs over a person (and, possibly, a society) that is given over to the indulgence of the senses, where sexuality is stripped of its capacity to transcend itself, where the sexual act does not actually start or energize the ascent toward the word Carver unabashedly also calls "soul" (*No Heroics* 225). What awaits the protagonist of such a life is an inevitable 'Fall' such as the final words of the story describe following his return to Patti:

I couldn't take any more tonight. 'Go back to sleep, honey [Patti]. I'm looking for something,' I said. I knocked some stuff out of the medicine chest. Things rolled into the sink. 'Where's the aspirin?' I said. I knocked down some more things. I didn't care. Things kept falling.

41 Are we to presume that the narrator has been stirred into some realization of his fault when we see that at the closing of the narrative he does not indulge his lust on Patti as he did in the beginning but bids her to go back to sleep? If so, it is in an embryonic state, having not yet crystallized into a resolution he consciously takes to transform his life in any radical sense. The man who works in a hospital still looks for a palliative in aspirin, an analgesic that will deaden the blow he has suffered at the "spade bar" rather than cure it. The reader knows, however, that it is not with aspirin that he will prevent the descent any more than Patti can find self-respect in selling vitamins door to door if she is deprived of the dialogic sustenance of her spouse. It is by *hearing* her needs, a sense or capacity he seemed not to have throughout the narrative but which he may have recovered during the brief moment the "music stopped," as if to create the necessary stillness in which he heard at least a part of what Nelson "yelled":

Nelson yelled something over the music. He yelled, 'It ain't going to do no good! Whatever you do, it ain't going to help none!' I heard him say that, and then I

couldn't hear anymore. The music stopped, and then it started again. *We didn't look back.* (emphasis added)

- 42 While invoking the biblical couple's expulsion from Paradise, the above couple that "didn't look back," simultaneously reverses a fundamental premise of the original Fall: it is from a place of darkness rather than light that they have been expelled. The "spade place" in which Donna and the narrator sought an Eden in which to hide their lust is no Paradise but a metaphorical Hell, such as Nelson evoked when he said "*Hell, here another hundred...*" (emphasis added). Having just left the war and the specter of dead bodies off which he chopped an ear as a relic or "keepsake," it is a hell he not only knows firsthand but whose negative forces he has thoroughly assimilated. It is such appropriation of the destructive forces of virility—of death—that will enable him to simultaneously function as exorcist or 'black magus' for the narrator. For it is a *magic* of sorts that is signaled through the insistence on the presence of Nelson's hat: "Nelson looked across the booth to Donna. Then he took off the hat. He seemed to be looking for something on the brim as he turned the hat around in his big hands. He made room for the hat on the table. He looked up at Donna." Once the narrator's eye has taken in the hat, his regard will rarely leave it: "We were bunched in the booth, glasses in front of us, Nelson's hat on the table." Along with the wallet and the ear, the hat is one of the three sacramental objects whose murmur of a discourse the couple must first hear in order to ultimately discard them—as Nelson does—and thus annul their "spell":

'No way. Fuck off,' Donna said.

'Girl,' Nelson said.

'Nelson,' I said. And then Nelson fixed his red eyes on me. He pushed the hat and wallet and cigarette case out of his way.

'What do you want?' Nelson said. 'I give you what you want.'

- 43 By pushing away "the hat *and* wallet *and* cigarette case" in that order, Nelson has eliminated the spell (the hat) of harlotry (the wallet) by curing the deafness (the ear in the cigarette case) in the protagonist. If Nelson is presented as a negative figure it is because the narrator needed to immerse himself in negativity before he could emerge from it, needed to touch the nadir of his existence before having any glimpse of a light—dis-grace being necessary for redemption. The man the narrator contemptuously refers to as a "spade" may be no aureolated guide in a Dantesque Hell yet no less hallow in his function of showing him the "way" out of it by first shaking him out of his existential inertia, a process which is confluent with an analogous shaking of his virility.
- 44 In the above function, Nelson's red eyes cannot but remind us of *occhi di braggia*, the "fire-red" eyes Dante attributes to Charon, he who brings the dead to Hell. Upon seeing Dante, "a living soul," Charon angrily tells him this is not a place for him but for the phantom-like dead. In an uncanny parallelism, Nelson yells in anger at an analogous "living soul" that has rendered its "soul" as if dead, his existence but a shadow of life. Nelson needed to threaten him before giving him what he wanted—not what he desired or lusted after but what he was in dire need or "want" of: a meaningful dialog with Woman (Donna) through which he can dialog with the deeper male forces of his own being. Paradoxically, it is the only process through which he can restore Patti's self-respect, and ultimately his own.

Part II

- 45 Clearly, then, if we began by questioning the presence of "dignity" in Carver's fiction, we are compelled to acknowledge it as a vital ingredient of that fiction in so far as it remains that which his characters are after—consciously or unconsciously—but which they neither achieve *en bloc* nor within the space of a story. It connects, therefore, oppositionally to what Tess Gallagher saw as a quality with which Carver endowed his "middle-class working people." For he does not give it to them any more freely or unconditionally than Nelson gave it to the narrator. Like the black man, he may show them the "way" to redemption by first showing them the "want" of dignity in their lives, a process we see in other stories as well.⁴ We may say, finally, that "dignity" remains what writing itself is for Carver: "a process more than a fixed position" (*Fires* 218).
- 46 For the narrator of "Vitamins" that process is relational: the movement toward the forging of a self-image cannot take place outside his rapport—or collision—with the others. He is, consequently, Patti's deaf husband, Donna's seducer, a "bastard" for Sheila; Benny's "brother," Khaki's "friend," a feminized male for Nelson when he warns Donna: "You go with this mother here,...you both going to have to deal with me." In so far as they modify their self in their contact with him and he with them, all characters are functions of each other. In the composite of the above functions, consequently, lies one 'character' that is fractured rather than of a piece. If a name designated such character's homogeneity in the past, functional-ity now best relays his/her molecular process of construction as opposed to any essentialist fixity of a self.
- 47 To the above functions within the story, however, one must not overlook to add one which connects the narrator with a space outside it as he relates his story of parts to, and thus relates with, a reader. The above relation points to the narrator as scriptor, a function which Carver often indicates through the deictic but also *writing* "fingers."⁵ In "Vitamins" it is through the "broken finger" in Sheila—an extension or function of an equally broken narrator—that the writer points to as he in-scribes his presence in the text:
- [Sheila] was sure her little finger was broken. She showed it to me. It looked purple...She brought the finger up close and looked at it. She shook her head. She held the finger as far away as she could and looked some more. It was like she couldn't believe the things that must have happened to her that night...She ran cold water on her finger...She was holding the wrist of her bad hand with her good hand, the little finger as big as a *pocket flashlight*...She looked at her finger again and said, 'Goddam, why'd this have to happen?' (emphasis added)
- 48 The broken finger that had turned into a "pocket flashlight" is a signal of our narrator's rupture with Sheila, the feminine forces that fled from him in his inability to activate them in her. To the extent that Sheila is a function of himself, the phallic significance of the tumefied organ signals a similar disorder or ailment in his sexuality but also in that of the narrative, whose forces are likewise male and female, moving like Patti and her "girls" but also erect like three "spades," the oscillation in the above axis representing the motion of the signifier being menaced by mimetic hegemony. Curing his indifference to Sheila would be a way of appropriating the positive forces she contains (loyalty to Patti), of integrating them constructively along with the ones contained in the other female characters. Similarly, appropriating the lesson of the "three spades" would be a way of cultivating the terrain of his virility (using "spade" as

a "digging instrument" ["Preservation"] rather than a weapon) and shaping it into an equally constructive force that may ultimately contain—without deadening—the feminine movement. By analogy, therefore, a text also can be emasculated when deprived of *tonus* or the force that may govern the anarchic dissemination of its 'feminine' parts. To be constructive, that force must also attract rather than repel or exile any part of a 'character' such as Sheila ensomatizes. Bringing her/it back to the narrative space can only invigorate or 'vitaminize' the whole.

- 49 What the finger relays, in other words, is that "the so-called personality of the author is dissolved in the very act of writing: it is the product and the instrument of the writing process" (Calvino 15). It is the finger that "signals" ("Signals") the constant shuffle taking place between the life of a narrator and the life of his text, the permeability between the two spaces through a process Valéry calls *glissando* (*Cah. II* 1142): from Sheila's finger to her body, to the narrator's body, to the body of his narrative. Through such a process, what was once called the plot or action of the story now overlaps with a sub-plot functioning as a body of signs, as Donna intuit: "I'm leaving town. I take *what happened* back there as a sign" (emphasis added).
- 50 "Broken," the finger signals the broken-ness in his story, whose fissures draw the reader's eye into the sub-mimetic zone where lies all that which *le langage nous permet de ne pas voir*, "language permits us not to see" (Valéry, *Cah. I* 448). For if the eye can "slide right over" (*Fires* 16) the smooth mimetic surface through a mere look, only a penetrating gaze—extended in time through a retrospective and multiple reading—can fix the moving territory underneath the mimetic linearity. The frequent occurrence of "regard"⁶ in Carver's fiction is another sign that it is the above gaze that he solicits in the reader. Behind such solicitation of his/her perspective into his process is a fundamental axiom of relativity: "...the essential dependence of every physical phenomenon on the standpoint of the observer" (Bohr 24). While the perspective of writer and reader, consequently, may be interdependent, it can never coincide.
- 51 As "observer" of the phenomenon in its mute and atomised state, the writer is initially left without speech: *A mesure que l'on approche le réel on perd la parole*, "The more we approach the real the more we lose our speech" (Valéry, *Cah. I* 386). He who entitled his first collection *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* knew something about the incapacity of the syntactic order alone to penetrate into what Tess Gallagher calls "the sumptuousness of presence" (cit. Schweizer 61) and render the phenomenon "palpable," as he also knew that image-making—also a cognitive experience—can offset that deficiency. Awareness of the lacunary aspect of language, in brief, makes Carver veer "from writing to a pictorial or symbolic form of understanding," as Harold Schweizer observed in his penetrating analysis of "Blackbird Pie" (66). Be it the horses in the above story, a cathedral in the story of its title, a peacock that "regarded" the visiting couple in "Feathers," or the dried-up ear in "Vitamins," there looms in every Carver story a "picture" (often of an ordinary object) containing a discourse all its own, a *vibrato* for the reader's ear to capture and to decode.⁷ It comes to buttress the verbal sequence, for *la structure de l'image a une syntaxe et une morphologie irréductibles au sens, puisque justement le sens vient se cacher dans les formes expressives de l'image*, "the structure of a picture has a syntax and a morphology irreducible to meaning, since, precisely, meaning comes to hide itself in the expressive form of the image" (Foucault 100).

- 52 To penetrate into *its* density, the regard of the reader must be no mere glance but synonymous with what Valéry calls an *opération* (*Cah. II* 272), an act-ivity in which the writer, according to Carver, must manage to engage "the reader's own artistic sense":

If the words are heavy with the writer's own unbridled emotions, or if they are imprecise and inaccurate for some other reason—if the words are in any way blurred—the reader's eyes will slide right over them and nothing will be achieved. The reader's own artistic sense will simply not be engaged. (*Fires* 16)

- 53 One way of engaging that sense is by soliciting us to re-write "Vitamins" as the story of its sub-plot, what we attempted to do in 'Part I' by transposing the function of words: from the vehicular to that of a sign. In analogy with the writer's pictorial rendering of the story, our resulting sub-text or deep [and moving] structure underneath the mimetic surface also solicits our "eyes" to see its process through a picture of our own: one lurking in the plethora of parts or granules—as on film—waiting to be activated and made to coalesce into shape by the light of the reader's retina. At the end of *our* multiple and retrospective reading of "Vitamins," consequently, the picture that progressively unveils itself is as broken as in Picasso or a DeKooning: one character whose inner forces are fractured into the Woman of Patti-Sheila-Donna as that trinity collides against the triarchy of the "three spades." It is, in other words, a "motion shot" such as the presumed writer in "Viewfinder" was asking the man with a Polaroid to take of his metonymic "house" of fiction⁸. The succession of parts or images which allows the narrator no fixedness of name results, in our view, in the formation of an open polyhedron, a structure that best captures the *déplacement du sujet vers lui-même*, "displacement of a subject toward himself" (Foucault, *Herméneutique* 238).

- 54 We see, consequently, that the picture of the reader, s/he who views all parts of the subject's life/story, is essential to the writer precisely because of the difference in his/her position (*hedra*): outside rather than inside the execution of the story in which the writer/protagonist himself is to be found. As such, it provides him with *an other* perspective through which he can in turn *regard*—'view' as well as 'morally assess'—his life. For the "operation" of regarding the existential parts is never neutral, as we have seen. Recomposing them as we did could not but implicate us in the making of an ethical assessment of the narrator's existence as well, one which was not in the parts prior to the reader's act of reconstruction. Thus Carver has not dictated a moral lesson to us any more than does a writer like Calvino when he writes:

...moral problems reside not in the field of literature, but in that of practical behavior. Literature creates autonomous figures that may be used as terms of comparison with experience or with other constructions of the mind. It is only by means of such reflection on the part of the reader that literature can be linked to some ethical activity; that is, only by means of a comparison of the values the reader is looking for with those the work of literature seems to suggest or imply. But this has to be a *critical* reflection, which is why 'moralizing', 'edifying', or 'educative' literature has never been any good as a moral stimulus, except for the reader who strips it of the hoax and discovers the falsity and hypocrisy of it. (36)

- 55 The twentieth-century writer in Carver who had appropriated the Einsteinian vision of matter, as well as the notion of the observer, similarly rejected the didactic premise of nineteenth-century realism—pre-processed moral messages emanating from a hegemonic author. In its place is the new imperative of an active, participatory reader, s/he who constructs the ultimate 'moral lesson' through her/his reading-as-regarding of the story's parts. If a polyhedron, consequently, was our "motion shot" of Carver's "mechanics" ("Popular Mechanics") it is only half the picture, as the moral thrust of

that molecular process is ultimately fixed in yet another: that of the biblical couple being expelled from Paradise, a topos of Renaissance paintings among which Masaccio's most readily comes to mind. If *stasis* is ultimately reached in a Carver narrative, we may conclude, it is in the stillness of icono-graphy and the religious allegory it contains—precisely what William Stull so convincingly showed readers in his analysis of "A Small Good Thing." »⁹

- 56 The technical *maestria* Carver displays in engaging readers without subduing or depriving them of their supreme autonomy finds an echo in one of Valéry's definitions of a poet: *Le poète n'a pas pour but de communiquer une 'pensée', mais de faire naître en autrui l'état émotif auquel une pensée analogue (mais non identique) à la sienne convient*, "The poet's aim is not to communicate a 'thought' but to create in the other the emotional state to which an analogous thought (but not identical) to his own corresponds" (*Cah. II* 1127). If we have nuanced or questioned, therefore, parts of Tess Gallagher's statement—a dialogic process which takes away nothing from its power to provoke us into trying to "fathom how it worked"—there remains the last part of her series of assertions that we cannot but leave *tel quel* or wholly endorse: "Their suffering was made *emotionally palpable*, for Carver was first of all a poet" (emphasis added).
- 57 Carver's mechanics split a nineteenth-century narrative into two parts: a story in its mimetic linearity and a space that can be called poetic underneath it, if "poetry results from the multiplicity, from the non-uniformity of signification—or rather from the effects of a sign," *la poésie résulte de la multiplicité, de la non-uniformité des significations—ou plutôt des effets d'un signe* (Valéry, *Cah. II* 1123)¹⁰. Carver achieves such poetry through what Tess Gallagher aptly describes as "his honed prose...refined with the precision of a diamond-cutter" (105). For the above craftsman, words are not "honed" so as to merely serve in the verbal linearity of syntax but to assert their autarchy, the very activity through which they come to signify rather than submit to the demands of realism. The adamant metaphor, therefore, is a felicitous one, for unlike a pearl, which loses none of its value by being strung in a necklace with others of its kind, a diamond is best appraised in isolation: each for its prismatic, chromatic, or polyhedric quality. Poetry similarly emerges in a Carver narrative through a language that is polysemic rather than univocal, through the semantic resonance of words without which the reader could not, in turn, engage in the (poetic) process of *ποίησις* which Carver already signals in his first story of "Fat" through his frequent use of "make."¹¹
- 58 If image-making, finally, is more proper to poetry than to narrative, in the picture of the narrator and Donna leaving the "spade place" without "look[ing] back" Carver may be telling us that he also, like Tess Gallagher, saw himself as "first of all a poet." For the Hell they leave behind has its pagan counterpart in Hades, the underworld from which Orpheus, the poet, could also lead out Eurydice, provided that mythological couple didn't look back either. The above reinforces the vision of a literary Carver we share with Ewing Campbell, who writes: "Beneath Carver's so-called plain style, readers can find a keen literary interpretation of a particular time and place, universal themes, and a cultural mythology that expands the context of his insistently local stories" (X). Keen, also, in our view, is Carver's awareness of where the new narrative was going, for his stories bear witness to the following words by the Swiss writer Jacques Chessex: *Depuis Flaubert, le roman est Poésie*, "Since Flaubert, the novel [has become] Poetry" (52).
- 59 Implicit in the image of Carver as a diamond cutter, finally, is an intense self-reflexivity, the "regard" an apprentice writer brings to stories which are inherently

problematic. This forms the primary link between him and Einstein, if we adhere to the axiom that "just like scientists, artists [also] solve problems" (Miller 245). Transposing the axiom to literature, Paul Valéry, who was imbued with the theory of relativity and a friend of Einstein, saw the new reader or critic in relation to such a self-regarding writer: *L'objet d'un vrai critique devrait être de découvrir quel problème l'auteur s'est posé (sans le savoir ou le sachant) et de chercher s'il l'a résolu ou non*, "The object of a true critic ought to be to discover what problem the author posed (without knowing it or knowing it) and to find out whether he solved it or not" (*Cah. II* 1191). The technical problem Carver was trying to solve in "Vitamins" was how to present the reality underneath the homogeneous-appearing surface as it is perceived through the senses in its atomised and moving state. As that self-reflexive and problem-solving process becomes inseparable from *ἠθοποιεῖν*, a *character-making* or an *ethos-making* activity (both meanings merge in the Greek *ἦθος*), as we have also seen, it makes of Carver a self-regarding moralist.

- 60 As to the "impact" of his voice on fiction, few would agree today that it has been as seismic as Einstein's discovery on science. American writers continue to write as in the nineteenth-century,¹² continue to depict reality as it appears. What is more, the very notion of impact has met with some derision in the last decades of the twentieth century as prevalent theories would have us believe that 'great men'—whether scientists or artists—are a construct of their age, shaped by rather than shaping it in any way, mere transmitters of forces beyond their own demiurgic thrust. The Carver who wrote "the days are gone, if they were ever with us, when a novel or a play or a book of poems could change people's ideas about the world they live in or about themselves" would in part adhere to the above, for his fiction has done away with the humanistic illusion, his characters' lives are far from determined by an Aristotelian choice.
- 61 Nevertheless, it persists in connecting with that same humanistic tradition even as it reverses or negates its Promethean presumption: Carver's narratives do not pretend to tell us how human "dignity" is achieved, and, least of all, how a God-like author can grant it to his characters. They are content with merely transmitting its absence in our world. And "that," we heard in Nelson's yelling, is an affirmative negation—signaling an embryonic new consciousness that can only begin with knowing what we, along with the narrator of "Vitamins," are in want of.

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NOTES

1. For our analysis of the above point see V. Fachard, "What More Than Rita Can We Make of Carver's Parts in 'Fat'?" in *Journal of the Short Story in English* (33), Autumn 1999, 25-48.
2. Carver's polysemic use of words permits us to extract the above from the context in which Khaki, another "spade" uses it when he addresses the narrator: "I haven't seen you for a spell."
3. In the case of the narrator, that canal remains as "plugged" as for Lloyd in "Careful," the story that immediately follows "Vitamins" but in which the autism of the sexes is reversed: in the latter narrative it is Ines, the wife, who is not receptive to the needs and distress of an alcoholic husband.
4. In "The Bridle," the accident that maimed Holits (Holi-ts, tis-Hol[i]) for life was precipitated by the irresponsible group that was urging him, for their own amusement, to jump from the roof of a cabana into the pool. The female narrator in that story also talks about the need to "bridle" the pleasure principle which governs their existence as she admonishes them after the accident: "You shouldn't have been out here. Any of you. We have rules. Now go on and take him to the hospital" (emphasis added). Similarly, before finding the blind man as his spiritual guide, the narrator of "Cathedral" has not a more edifying life than the male protagonist of our story, is in no less dire want of "dignity":
Every night I smoked dope and stayed up as long as I could before I fell asleep. My wife and I

hardly ever went to bed at the same time. When I did go to sleep, I had these dreams. Sometimes I'd wake up from one of them, my heart going crazy.

5. It was in a fat man's teratological fingers that the forces of a nascent fiction were contained in the story "Fat," as it was the "hand" and "fingers" of the narrator and presumed writer that the blind man guided toward the drawing of a monument with the religious resonance of "cathedral" in the eponymic story:

He took my hand...I drew flying buttresses. I hung great doors. I couldn't stop. The TV station went off the air. I put down the pen and closed and opened *my fingers*. The blind man felt around over the paper. He moved the tips of *his fingers* over the paper, all over what I had drawn and he nodded. (emphasis added)

6. In "Feathers" it was a peacock that "regarded" the city couple who look condescendingly at Olla and Bud's low-brow life, a "regard" which compels them to examine their own absence of life-sustaining values. In "Jerry and Molly and Sam" it is Suzy, a dog, that "regarded" the cowardly master who had abandoned her, her penetrating gaze functioning like the mirror in which he will ultimately see "his face [as] doughy, characterless--*immoral*, that was the word."

7. The frequent appearance of the word "picture" also speaks of its own importance in his process. It is a "picture," we recall, that Rudy had wished for at the end of his rudimentary narrative in "Fat." It is a "picture" of a "cathedral" the narrator and presumed writer draws with his blind mentor three collections later in the eponymic story. (See note 1.)

8. The photographer in the above story is a "man without hands" but "chrome hooks" in their place. While pointing to the *chrome*-containing or *chromatic* possibilities of the eye of the camera, the "hooks" with which he holds that object permit him to connect or 'hook on' to the writer. The latter, in turn, asks for not one but a *succession* of twenty "chrome" pictures, including one in the act of throwing a stone. Illustrating the statement in Valéry's *Eupalinos* that *tout se complique avec le mouvement*, "movement complicates everything" (*Oeuvres* II 137), the photographer/reader closes the story by answering, "I don't do motion shots." Albeit his incapacity (in an early collection [*What We Talk*], we presume) to provide such a "shot," he has, nevertheless, pointed to the perspective into his process the writer needs from an other "observer." (The above is a synopsis of a work in process.)

9. See William Stull, "Beyond Hopelessville: Another Side of Raymond Carver," *Philological Quarterly*, 1985 Winter, 64:1, 1-15.

10. Our vision of the above doubleness in a Carver narrative finds an echo in Harold Schweizer's "reading of Carver's poems as lyrical caesuras of his short stories" (66).

11. At the end of her mimetically fractured story, the narrator of "Fat" knows she has failed to engage Rita, her listener and presumed reader, in the above process: "That's a funny story, Rita says, but I can see she doesn't know what to make of it." (See note 1)

12. According to Paul Berman, John Updike's *Rabbit* "is a single very long novel written in a traditional and even somewhat old-fashioned form, well known to us from the nineteenth century" (4).

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