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"

MIKHAIL EPSTEIN

This small book is about blank spaces in language and culture and their formative role in major artistic movements of the 20th century. The book proposes new sign that denotes the absence of any sign and is conveyed by quotation marks around a blank space: "   ". This no-sign can be applied to many subject areas, including philosophy, theology, ethics, aesthetics, poetics, and linguistics.

"   " signifies, more adequately than any of these terms, the Absolute, Dao, the Endless, the Inexpressible, Différance, i.e., the ultimate condition of any signification. Each discipline has its own "   ", certain "unspeakable" assumptions that need to be presented inside disciplinary frontiers, as a blank margin moved inside the medium. "   " allows language to speak the unspeakable. The book presents "   " not only theoretically, but also graphically, in its format and design.

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Born in Moscow in 1950, he moved to the USA in 1990. He was the founder and director of the Moscow Laboratory of

Contemporary Culture, Experimental Center of Creativity (1988). He was Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (Washington, DC, 1990 – 1991), Center for Humanistic Inquiry at Emory University (2002 – 2003), The Institute of Advanced Study at Durham University (England, 2011), working on projects related to the study of ideology, language, philosophy, and the future of the humanities. He has authored 20 books and approximately 600 essays and articles that have been translated into 15 languages.

Professor Epstein's work represents a compendium of ideas that diverge from the existing paradigms in the humanities. His writings are full of proposals for new disciplines, for new genres and concepts, and for new words to describe them. Semiurgy, for example, would be the science of how to produce new signs, and silentology, the inverse of linguistics. This is what actually the humanities' enterprise may be: finding blank spaces in the languages of existing disciplines and trying to fill them. The contemporary humanities, according to Epstein, are in transition from the philosophy of analysis to the philosophy of synthesis. Each act of the analysis contains a possibility for a new synthesis. The strategy of the language synthesis, or what can be called constructive nominalism, now presents itself as an alternative to the analytical tradition. Inasmuch as the subject of philosophy—universals, ideas, general concepts—are presented in language, the task of a philosopher is to enhance the existing language, to synthesize new terms and concepts, lexical units and grammar rules, to increase the volume of the speakable and therefore of the thinkable. If in the 20th century philosophers concentrated on the analysis of language, in the 21st century, they will focus on the synthesis of the variety of new languages (discourses, disciplines). Epstein calls his method potentiation and contrasts it with the traditional predominance of the actual (or real) over the potential in the ontology of Aristotle and Hegel. Analysis is focused on the actual, whereas synthesis looks into the multiple potentials hidden in any given actuality.

MIKHAIL EPSTEIN

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“   ”

By Mikhail Epstein

Cover design by
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Medium and Margin: The Reversal

I offer a new sign that signifies the absence of any sign and is conveyed by a pair of quotation marks around a blank space.

I speak about the blank space that surrounds and underlies the text and about the way we can present it within the text and make it the focus of our thinking.

Any text has its medium and margin. What if their roles, prescribed by these names, were reversed, and the margin found itself within the medium? (By "margins," in the broad sense, I mean also the background of the text.)

The margin placed within the medium looks like "   " if we choose to designate the boundaries of this blank space with quotation marks.

"　　　" Is a Citation

The role of quotation marks is to recognize the usage (incorporation, repetition) of a source external to the given text.

However, the text of this paper cites not some other text but its own margin, the environment that makes this text possible, visible, writable, readable.

By putting the blank space in quotation marks, we reverse the relationship between the "inside" and "outside" of the text. The outside moves inside.

My way of introducing "　　" in an oral presentation is a short interval of silence marked by air quotes.

Medium and Margin

This simple scheme shows how the margins move inside the medium and are delimited within it by quotation marks:

margin   medium   margin

medium   " margin "   medium
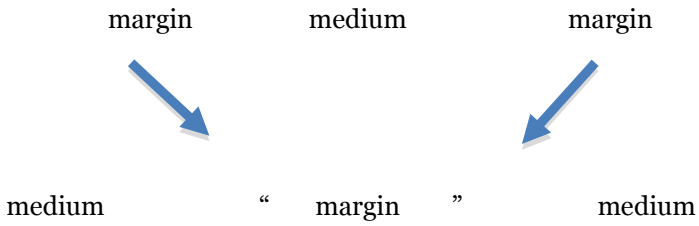
Text and Environment

In the same way, the environment of the text moves inside the text and becomes one of its elements, a textual sign demarcated by quotation marks:
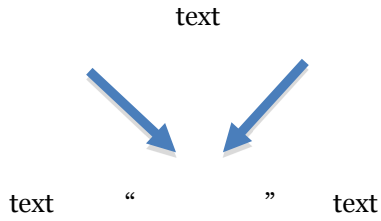
text

text   "   "   text

The Environment of the Text

The paper on which the text is written or printed, or the canvas of a painting, or the screen of a computer, forms the environment of the text.

The margins and the background of the text constitute not only its environment but also the precondition of its susceptibility to being written and read.

The text of this paper is self-reflective. It incorporates its own margin and stages a visual and semiotic experiment with one nonverbal sign: "   ".

This sign transforms the environment of the text into one of its components, a new sign that functions among other textual signs.

Indexical Sign

The sign "   " is not a symbolic or an iconic sign, like letters or pictures. It belongs to the third, indexical variety of signs (in the triadic classification of Charles Peirce).

An index is a part (a cause or an effect) of what it signifies, as smoke is an index of a fire, or dark clouds are an index of impending rain. Indices are ubiquitous in nature but almost never appear on printed pages (for example, in books or albums).

"   " is the only textual indexical sign I can think of, because it signifies the empty background that underlies each text and makes it visible and articulate. "   " is itself a part of what it signifies; it belongs to this pure, white "ether" that surrounds the text, as dark clouds belong to rainy weather.

Through this transparent "   " we see the background directly, but within the quotation marks it becomes a sign of itself.

The Beyond of the Text: Relativity and Universality

Wittgenstein: "What can be shown, cannot be said" (*Tractatus)*. In "   ", language *shows* its beyond—the transcendent region of the world that cannot be said in language but can only be shown. We can see "   ", but we cannot say it. While ceasing to speak, language begins to show, operating as an index and pointing to the environment beyond itself.

What appears within the quotation marks varies from one medium to another (it may be white or blue, paper or screen, sand or stone), but in each   case "   " represents the condition specific to its particular medium. On the white it is white, on the blue it is blue.

It is consubstantial with its medium, which makes this sign both relative and universal.

"   " is the same everywhere, in each language, on each surface, precisely because it points to the given surface; it directly manifests "the beyond" of the text through its internal gap.

Search for the Ultimate Sign

From antiquity, philosophers and language theorists have looked for a sign to adequately convey that which conditions the existence or possibility of signs.

There are many words to designate the ultimate nature of everything: *Absolute, Idea, Oneness, Essence, Nothing, Infinity, Unnameable, Dao, Différence . . .*

According to Heidegger: to name the "beingness of being," language must come up with a unique "singular word." Heidegger's candidate is the Greek *ov*: Being.

But even the most universal verbal signs used to express the infinite, inexhaustible nature of Being are not adequate to their intended signified, because verbal signs are symbolic, conditional, arbitrary.

Laozi: "*Dao* that can be expressed in words is not a permanent *Dao*."

Derrida: "'Older' than being itself, such a *différance* has no name in our language. . . . If it is unnameable, it is not provisionally so, not because our language has not yet found or received this name, or because we would have to seek it in another language. . . . It is rather because there is no *name* for it at all, not even the name of essence or of being, not even that of '*différence*'. . . . "

Each of such words is only one among many, a combination of letters, characters, glyphs. No such word or name has privilege over any other word or name, in any language, in designating the condition of naming.

"   " in Philosophy

The philosophical language game can go on forever searching for a single name that transcends the contingency and arbitrariness of verbal signs. A primordial and universal principle cannot be expressed with verbal signs, but it cannot remain unexpressed either. Philosophy is the most general investigation into the nature of the world and a search for fundamental concepts to express it.

A fundamental concept can be articulated only at the frontier of language. It cannot be within language, given the arbitrariness of language; it cannot be outside language, because then it would not be a sign. At the frontier of language may be a sign both inside and outside that can express the non-speakable condition of speakability, the nonverbal condition of verbality.

"   " is adequate for this purpose because, as both sign and index, it manifests the conditions of both signification and indication.

"   " speaks the most universal language, that of the blank space.

"   " gives a name to what creates a condition for naming.

"   " is a more adequate and universal term for the Absolute or the Infinite than the words *absolute* and *infinite,* which are composed of certain letters in a certain language.

Negative Semiotics and
Apophatic Theology

"   " is an indexical sign; but from the point of view of symbolic signs that constitute a language, it is not a sign.

The (non) sign "   " belongs to the field of *negative semiotics* and corresponds to the concept of the unknowable, invisible, undefinable God in apophatic theology. Contrary to cataphatic theology, which represents God in positive terms ("light," "strength," "reason," "perfection"), apophatic theology ascends to God and speaks about God through silence and darkness, nonvisibility and nonspeakability.

In apophatic terms, this Final Cause (as Pseudo-Dionysius called God) can be designated the "   " of theology.

The oral equivalent of "   " is a pause: an articulate unit of silence.

One can apply "   " as a universal semiotic concept in any subject area, not only philosophy or theology. Each discipline has its own "unspeakable" conditions and assumptions that need to be presented inside disciplinary frontiers. At the same time, such conditions and assumptions need to be sequestered from representation because they remain transcendent with respect to what they make possible. Hence the need for a negative semiotics: a semiotics of nonsigns.

The Ecology of Text

There is a parallel in the relationships between text and nontext, culture and nature.

Nature is posited (usually) as the outside of culture, as its preexisting condition and environment.

Ecology, as an ethical concern and social function, attempts to turn the "outside" of culture into its "inside." National parks, wildlilfe refuges, nature sanctuaries become zones of nature inside civilization, protected by civilization from civilization.

This shift is paralleled in ecologically conscious philology, linguistics, literary and cultural studies by the same transformation of the text's environment into its interior area, "   ". Here quotation marks function as do the boundaries of nature sanctuaries within industrial settings and developed areas.

"   " is an island of environmental purity, a sanctuary of nontext within the text.

Ecophilology (I)

Ecophilology is a discipline that explores the role of textual environments in all kinds of settings and media, from ancient cave drawings and graffiti to contemporary electronic media.

Ecophilology considers:

The number of printed signs per square meter of living space as a measure of semiotic saturation of space.

The semiotic load of offices, streets, public places, various cities and countries.

The textual capacity of a space: the number of posters, billboards, slogans, announcements, street signs per square mile or other unit of territory.

The length of texts. The size of a text as an ecological factor.

With the increase of textual production—the "information explosion"—the size of texts that compete for readership needs to decrease. The number of classics, the texts that must be read, increases, thus increasing the number of people—the "uneducated"—who have not read the classics.

Ecophilology (II)

Ecophilology also considers:

The ecology of various genres.

Fragment and aphorism are ecologically pure genres: tiny texts among vast, virginal—blank—spaces.

Chronotope and ecology.

"The space of the novel" means both its internal ("described"]) and external ("occupied") space. Intratextual chronotopes—a system of spatial and temporal imagery: how it is related to the extratextual chronotopes, the spatial and temporal extension of the text itself? The volume of the book, the multiplication of volumes of the same work. The ecology of book series, of anthologies, encyclopedias, complete works. Each of these megatextual wholes has its own environmental dimension.

Nonreading as a passive resistance to *semiocracy*, the power of signs.

Out of ten messages coming by e-mail, seven or eight end up in the trash can; to determine which ones, we need an undetermined amount of time. This factor is important. What is the time needed for detection of textual waste, how much time reading is necessary to establish that reading is unnecessary? What increase of semiotic procedures is required for nonparticipation in semiotic processes? How much do we need to read in order not to read?

Minus-time and minus-space of culture.

Verse and Prose

The difference between poetry and prose derives from their various interactions with " ". The variable, broken, zigzag layout of lines is characteristic of poetry, where the relationship between the text and " " changes from line to line.

> All happy families
> resemble one another;
> every unhappy family
> is unhappy in its own way.

Although this text comes from a novel, it reads as poetry in this layout because the structure of its intentionality is different from that of novels. The variation of blank spaces on the sides of the lines deepens the intensity of the semantic expectation. The potentiality of meaning exceeds the actual meaning.

In verse, " " is much more expansive, occupying the larger part of the page, and is more active: each line has its own zone of "unsaid" and "undersaid." This zone is resilient, now contracting, now expanding, in inverse relationship with the length of lines.

"   " and Eco-ethics

An aspect of ethics is the capacity to acknowledge the other as a condition of one's own existence. The pairs of attitudes required are difficult to combine. How to embrace the other without assimilation? How to love the other without subjugation? How is the other my own other if I do not own it? How do I maintain the other's otherness while integrating it with myself?

Through "   ", a text fulfills its ethical relationship with its own other by acknowledging and incorporating the textual other without textualizing it. The textual other is not replaced with verbal symbols.

The   ethics   of   the   relationship   between   the   text   and "   " may serve as a model for various human activities. We write and read texts but also speak, eat, love, breathe. Each activity has its own "   "—its precondition in the other that makes the activity possible.

  The precondition of eating is hunger. To honor the precondition, people fast. Fasting is not hunger in its primordial state; fasting is a *sign* of hunger, a *citation* of hunger within the "gastronomic" text of our life. Fasting is the "   " of eating.

"   ", Yoga, and Meditation

A precondition of our life is the instinct of breathing. It is honored in yoga nonbreathing, holding our breath, making the precondition of breathing, its
"   ", a self-referential sign in the "respirational" text of our life.

Yoga develops as well kinds of meditation that reveal the "   " of our consciousness by restoring it to its own precondition: nonconsciousness. A yogi is not unconscious as stones or plants are unconscious. The yogi is consciously unconscious as he reproduces, or quotes, the "unconscious" in the text of his consciousness.

Meditation   can   be   understood   as   the   search   for
"   " in the text(ure) of our life, as a reverential practice of citing the preconditions of our existence.

"   " is textual yoga, a meditation on textuality that restores and honors its precondition.

The present text, entitled "   ", with the many "clean zones" on its surface, is an experiment in textual fasting and self-purification through the sign   of
"   ".

"   ": Exposure and Concealment

"   " allows us to speak ethically about any primary condition without objectifying and verbalizing it in terms of its own consequences. The white that makes text visible is reciprocally made visible through "   ". It is both exposed and concealed, in the double gesture of gratitude and reverence.

"   " should not be verbalized (lexicalized, phoneticized, forcefully appropriated by the text).

Alain Badiou: "Evil in this case is to want, at all costs and under condition of a truth, to force the naming of the unnameable. Such, exactly, is the principle of disaster."

The White Paintings of
Robert Rauschenberg

"   " in Visual Art

"   " played an important role in art movements of the twentieth century. When presented as unpainted canvas, as background left unfinished in a completed work, the background moves forward and takes the place of foreground.

The original blank canvas was shown at Black Mountain College in 1953. In the *White Paintings* of Robert Rauschenberg, painting exposed its own preconditions, hidden (usually or previously) under layers of paint.

The next stage in the evolution of "void art" was its spread from individual works to an entire exhibition space. Yves Klein's exhibition "The Void" (Paris, 1958) consisted of empty, whitewashed walls.

Kazimir Malevich, White on White

MALEVICH: SUPREMATIST COMPOSITION,
WHITE ON WHITE

"   " in Malevich

Kazimir Malevich, the father of Suprematism, is also founder of margin-into-medium art. His painting *White on White* (1918) is an *image* of the background, contrasting only slightly with the background itself, which in turn may be an image of a larger background that surrounds the painting (a wall in the exhibition space, or the computer monitor in a Power Point presentation).

This case of a double visual citation, the citation of a citation, is comparable with a smaller "   " placed between two larger ones:

<p style="text-align:center">❝   "   „   ❞</p>

Since "   "   comes   in   different   sizes, "   "s can be placed one within another, like Russian dolls. The citational mode (both visual and textual) can be continued and multiplied ad infinitum.

As there is intentional blankness within blankness, so there is silence within silence, as anyone knows who has survived a deep conversation.

Ilya Kabakov, At the Big Artistic Council
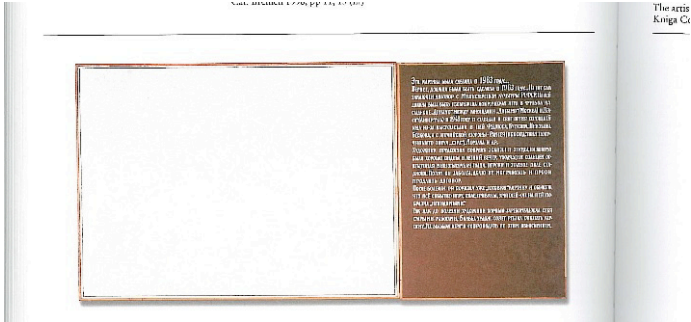
"   " in Conceptualism

Conceptualism departs from most traditional art by introducing into visual space, on the one hand, texts, and, on the other hand, emptiness. Thus conceptualism simultaneously crosses the frontiers of visual representation in two nonvisual directions: one extralinguistic (toward "   "), and the other alterlinguistic (toward words). Even in a work of visual art, text and "   " appear to gravitate toward each other in their opposition to visuality. The extralinguistic and the alterlinguistic are correlated and balanced, the words pointing to what is empty and unseen.

In Ilya Kabakov's work *At the Big Artistic Council* (1983), the area of words presupposes and defies the area of emptiness. The reader/viewer learns about the painting of a football game and the discussion at the arts council only from the detailed caption, while in place of the image we find the smooth white surface (with only one, almost imperceptible image of a ball). The verbal description corresponds to the blank canvas.

John Cage, 4'33"

"   " in Music

A musical manifestation (and manifesto) of "   " is found in the composition *4'33"* (1952) by the American composer John Cage. The score instructs the performer not to play an instrument for the duration of the piece. Although commonly referred to as *Four Minutes Thirty-three Seconds of Silence*, the composition consists of sounds—the sounds of the environment that the listeners hear while the piece is (non) performed. The outside of the text moves inside, once again, to become framed as a separate piece.

" " in Literature

One of the earliest examples of " " in a literary work is "Poema kontsa" ("The Long Poem of the End") by Vasilisk Gnedov. This poem concludes his collection *Smert iskusstvu* (*Death to Art*, 1913) and consists of one page that, except for the title, the page number, and the publisher's seal at the bottom, is left blank.

The poem was performed: "Gnedov would raise his arm and then quickly let it fall in a dramatic gesture, eliciting stormy applause from the audience" (Adrian Wanner). Another witness, Ivan Ignatiev, says there was a rhythmic gesticulation of Gnedov's hand from left to right and from right to left, performed so that one movement nullified the other and represented, symbolically, a self-erasure.

Below is a clean page—Gnedov's one-page poem. It *is* a poem and needs to be *read*. Please do so attentively, even should you feel dizzy while doing so.

Vasilisk Gnedov, "The Long Poem of the End"

" ": The Paradox of Invisibility

If we look at a white wall or a blue tablecloth, we see colors as a part or feature of physical space. We cannot contemplate in the same way, as a material surface, the blank white paper or the blank blue screen that serve as a *background for signs*. Those are a semiotic vacuum, existing at the zero level of semioticity. We do not look *at* them, we look *into* them—and, the more we look, the more we lose the object of contemplation. Whiteness and blueness are no longer colors of the material surface, but the depth of the sign-continuum, which is essentially colorless, as the pure potentiality of signs and meaning is colorless.

When we cease to *look*, per se, at the blank page (which is, after all, perfectly visible) and try instead to *read* its blankness, we experience a sort of dizziness. The semiotic vacuum invites reading and simultaneously prevents it, since the vacuum has no signs to read. It is this loss of orientation that is the cause of dizziness.

The Metaphysics of "   "
in Melville

"But not yet have we solved the incantation of this whiteness and learned why it appeals with such power to the soul. . . . Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the Milky Way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows. . . ?"

—Moby-Dick

The Phenomenology of

" "

From a blank page or screen, our vision receives this mixed message: Look at the text, not at the surface. But it is only the material surface that we find there; we find no text. We strain and overstrain to see beyond the colored surface into the semiotic void, which is the absent, merely and purely intentional object of reading.

What we read in this blankness is the *intentionality* of discourse as such, its phenomenological writability and readability, though it remains factually unwritten and unread (sans text).

From the phenomenological point of view, the blankness of a page or screen is a mode of notation, but not one comprising notes, numbers, letters, glyphs, or characters. This notation is one of intention—the intention to write and to stimulate reading. We are dealing with merely and purely intentional semiotic objects. Learning of the intentionality deepens our perception of a blank page or screen so that we can see or begin to see in it the invisibility of what we are looking into, and at the same time can begin not to see the seeable surface.

Semiotic Vacuum: White Holes

If we want to learn *to read* in the full meaning of the verb, we need to read the potentiality of writing, not only its actualization in letters.

Introduced into a text, "   " explodes its own code of signification from within, causing a semiotic shock in the reader.

"   " is perceived not as a gray or glossy white page but as semiotic no-thingness, a *white hole* that both provokes and denies our intention in reading.

White holes of textuality may be regarded as semantic analogues of the black holes of the physical universe. The so-called vacuum described by physics is not vacuous at all. It holds a tremendous amount of energy in the form of virtual particles (envisioned by some scientists as a limitless source of free energy). Similarly, the semiotic vacuum holds a tremendous amount of energy in the form of virtual words and meanings.

The Semantic Intensity of White Holes

If the semantic intensity of text equals *one*—for an actual sign corresponds to its actual meaning—then the semantic intensity of margins approaches *zero* in the reader's perception. For in the absence of actual signs, there is no expectancy of potential signification.

By contrast, the semantic intensity of " " approaches *infinity*, as its potential significance is textually inscribed in the absence of an actual sign.

" " is a singular event in the life of the text. A singularity means a point where some property becomes infinite. For example, at the center of a black hole the density is infinite.

" " as a white hole is a singularity because it represents the potentially infinite environment of the text condensed in one nonverbal sign with its semantic density approaching infinity.

Transtextual Reading

Observe yourself while reading a text full of white holes. Your glance is instinctively drawn to and, at the same time, repelled by them, for you sense both constructive and destructive energy breaking up the text and hindering your perception of semantic coherence.

Such is the difficulty of our direct encounter with the intentionality of writing, when it reveals itself in the rupture of a text.

Gradually, the reader develops "transtextual intentionality," by which I mean: attention to the boundaries of text, to its margins and internal blanks.

How to Pronounce "   "?

"   " presents a particular difficulty because we do not know how to pronounce it (whereas *Absolute*, *Dao*, and *ov* are all pronounceable).

As we attempt to pronounce "   ", we catch ourselves filling the pause with a nonphonetic sound like "mhm" or "eh," which stops abruptly, recognizing its lack of motivation and a failure of full articulation.

"   " functions in our internal speech as a mechanism of disruption. The intention to pronounce "   " cannot realize itself in any phonetically motivated form. Thus, "   " presents itself as a barrier between potentiality and actuality in speech formation.

How to Verbalize "   "?

At first we look at "   " in a lexical and morphological manner, searching through synonyms (mostly nouns) and choosing a word that seems appropriate in some context: "blank," "whiteness," "emptiness," "void." Each time we come across "   " on the page, we replace it with our favorite synonym.

Soon, however, we realize that a substitution appropriate for one context does not fit in others. As contexts alternate, "   " is purified in our perception of all synonyms or fillers and reveals its unique meaning to us in its wholeness, its holeness, its semiotic holiness, as the sign of pure (un)pronounceability, (un)readability, and (un)writability, for which there is no substitute among verbal signs.

"   " works as a mechanism of disrupture and deautomatization, not only of any specific text, but also of textuality as such.

As a result of this experience, this defamiliarization, our relationship with our own internal "speech" may become more conscious.

The Unconscious of
the Unconscious

As a rule, we use language unconsciously—and language itself, according to Lacan, manifests the structure of the unconscious. Thus, the margins that surround texts and tend to remain unnoticed can be conceptualized as a linguistic unconscious of a second order: the unconscious of the unconscious.

By introducing "   " into text, we become aware of this double unconscious and acquire a new consciousness of the language within language. Through this white hole, language exposes to our vision and consciousness whatever was previously buried in its invisible, unconscious depths.

History of " "

"   " is historical and belongs to the history of textuality and to the history of consciousness. Meyer Schapiro:

> We take for granted today as indispensable means the rectangular form of the sheet of paper and its clearly defined smooth surface on which one draws and writes. But such a field corresponds to nothing in nature or mental imagery where the phantoms of visual memory come up in a vague unbounded void. The student of prehistoric art knows that a regular field as an advanced artifact presupposes a long development of art. The cave paintings of the Old Stone Age are on unprepared ground, the rough wall of a cave; the irregularities of earth and rock show through the image. . . . The smooth prepared field is an invention of a later stage of humanity.

For centuries texts were inscribed into "   ", which gradually expanded and became more refined, smooth, and clear. Thus was prepared the historical turning point, at which we can—now—inscribe "   " into the text.

What is avant-garde?

Lyn Hejinian: "A question has arisen among some graduate students at Berkeley as to why there is nothing in academic arts/humanities scholarship that might be comparable to the "avant-garde" in the arts proper. That is the question we hope to explore—what might experimental criticism or avant-garde scholarship look like?" (in an invitation to a conference titled "Medium and Margin," Berkeley, 2009).

Most avant-garde movements, including Futurism, Suprematism and Surrealism, emerged from avant-garde theories (manifestos, projects, utopian visions). Avant-garde theory tends to precede and shape avant-garde art.

The avant-garde experiments, radically, with sign systems undermining their foundations and reversing the order of subordination between their centers and peripheries.

Avant-garde: the reversal of medium and margin

The reversal of medium and margin is the textual analogue and prototype of all avant-garde reversals, a signature device of the avant-garde.

All margin-into-medium authors belonged to various avant–garde movements, from Futurism and Suprematism to Minimalism and Conceptualism.

Thus " " graphically represents what the avant-garde aims for: marginalizing the center, centralizing the periphery, voicing the mute, uncovering and advancing suppressed layers of culture.
Insofar as the humanities deal with texts and textuality, the avant-garde trend in theory would be the exploration of " " and its infinite manifestations across discourses and disciplines.

The End?

The text ends with the removal of quotation marks from " ".

Acknowledgments

Also by Mikhail Epstein

BOOKS AND MONOGRAPHS

In English:

1. *Cries in the New Wilderness: from the Files of the Moscow Institute of Atheism*. Trans. and intr. by Eve Adler. Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2002, 236 pp.

2. *Transcultural Experiments: Russian and American Models of Creative Communication* (with Ellen Berry). New York: St. Martin's Press (Scholarly and Reference Division), 1999, 340 pp. (of 23 chapters, 16 are written by this author).

3. *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture* (with Alexander Genis and Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover, in the series *Studies in Slavic Literature, Culture, and Society*, vol. 3). New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999, 528 pp. (of 24 chapters, 16 are written by this author). Hardcover and paperback editions.

4. *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture* (a volume in the series *Critical Perspectives on Modern Culture*, introd. and transl. by Anesa Miller-Pogacar), Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1995, 392 pp. Hardcover and paperback editions. Electronic edition, Boulder, Colo.: NetLibrary, Inc., 2000.

5. *Relativistic Patterns in Totalitarian Thinking: An Inquiry into the Language of Soviet Ideology*. Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, Occasional Paper, No.243. Washington: The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1991,94 pp.

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MIKHAIL EPSTEIN

This small book is about blank spaces in language and culture and their formative role in the discipline that can be called the "ecology of text."

The book offers a new sign that denotes the absence of any sign and is conveyed by quotation marks around a blank space: "   ".

This no-sign can be applied to many subject areas, including philosophy, theology, ethics, aesthetics, poetics, and linguistics.