

ELENI PAPAZOGLU

A Nothing Full

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,¹ it seemed like a good way to begin.² To start with an interval (and a footnote). To prioritise an addition, an afterthought and how that has come to be. To start with a grammatical error that feels true to *doing* reading, like taking a breath before starting to make sense. To start mid-sentence—aren't we always mid-something—and to start from someone else's start because it resonates, and resonance is more than—and calls for staying with,

a comma (,) is a short pause, is a scratch, is a mark, is a point (punctus) with a dancing tail. It's an ear—to the ground—waiting to hear the silence it instructs and all the anticipation that such carries. Before, a comma was a floating dot (·), and then, it was a slash (/). And these symbols were combined to make a new one.³ A comma is also hidden in a semicolon (;)—riskier and more pretentious⁴ than the sum of its parts—which in my mother tongue (Greek) stands for the question mark, so I always thought it hides a sense of hesitation even when used in English.⁵ *And that makes me think that sometimes knowing comes from elsewhere.*

A comma is one of my favourite of the many inscriptions of punctuation. The ones that sit in-between, one part, and the next. Between, and besides words and (besides) the point and what if *they* are the point, or at least carry some of it. And when saying is doing / by way of happening, a mouth,⁶ punctuation is the jewellery that dresses words for the event of making sense, indicating how a piece of writing is to be read, and understood. Indication is instructional and instruction is relational as it defines the way in which two or more people or things are connected (writer, reader, orator, listener) which is often the breath.

Breaths have always taken place but haven't always been accounted for. Prior to commas and full stops there was no spacing no stopping no pointing no pausing no taking count.⁷ And maybe there was more room for interpretation and also confusion. And taking count is obvious and difficult, and I am not sure how to honour signs—and work—that are thought as silent, or conditional, or peripheral,⁸ apart from giving them time and space which can also be called faith and trust.

I place a comma in a parenthesis (,)⁹ to give it space and time (faith and trust). It is an attempt to see it for what it is and not for what it does—if what it does is not the only thing it is. A method of referring to it: made possible by applying the mechanics of its own system to hold it still (,), even for a second. A framework turned upon (itself) to make sense of (itself) and is that even possible. But what becomes apparent is my anxiety to make sense or convey meaning and holding it too close, too tight, too much and limiting its possibilities.¹⁰ So I let it go—

¹ Lispector, C. (1961) *An Apprenticeship or The Book of Pleasures*. London: Penguin Books, p. 3.

² Burrows, J. (2022) *Writing Dance*. Brussels: Varamo Press.

³ M. T. J. Webber (2024) *Punctuation and the aural dimension of Latin texts in the Middle Ages* [Lecture]. Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London. Senate House Library, 12 November 2024.

⁴ Stein, G. (1985) *Lectures In America*, Boston: Beacon Press, pp 214-222. Originally published in 1935 by The Modern Library, Inc.

⁵ or; maybe the hesitation stems from the fact that no one actually knows how to use a semicolon.

⁶ McCarthy, T. (2017) *Nothing Will Have Taken Place Except the Place*, found in *Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays*. New York: The New York Review of Books. pp. 209-238.

⁷ scriptio continua (Latin for *continuous script*), is a style of writing without spacing of words, punctuation marks, and in which all letters are capitalised. E. Otha Wingo. (1972). *Latin punctuation in the classical age*. The Hague: Mouton.

⁸ like knowing how you know things

⁹ I mimicked this process from my school grammar book: Triantafyllidis, M. (2019) *Νεοελληνική Γραμματική* [translation: *Neo-Hellenic Grammar*]. Athens: Triantafyllidis Foundation. p. 28-29

¹⁰ McKittrick, K. (2021) *Footnotes (Books and papers scattered about the floor)* found in *Dear Science and Other Stories*. Durham: Duke University Press.

besides content and meaning. Form. And form as its own meaning, or essence i.e., a shape that refers to its own definition.¹¹ Forms grasp, cut, hold, release. Small performances inscribed in and through writing. Read as movement; their non-wordness¹² open-ended; asemic¹³ potentialities that are equal or greater than, event.¹⁴

*in the history of Chinese calligraphy [...] writing was first aesthetic and ritual rather than functional. Illegibility was [...] the essence of a practice [...], one that speaks of signs, but not sense.*¹⁵

Nonsense, is the frivolous act of stringing language together that has no meaning or conveys no intelligible ideas. An error. A mistake. An unreasonable ritual. A joy. In latin, the prefix err— stands for a wandering, a straying; of doubt; or uncertainty.¹⁶ Errors are moments of coming across a something else (with their own set of unconstrained possibilities) that calls attention to the systems which define sense,¹⁷ and consequently sense-making as a process.

Sense sounds like a rational word yet it is described as a feeling: that something *is* the case. Feeling is an action, a *doing*, with a dancing tail. It is an ear to the ground, that sits besides the point. It is a knowing from elsewhere; an indication that is instructional and instruction is relational and it is likely to start start mid-sentence, from someone else's start, with a breath—¹⁸

¹¹ Barthes, R. (1971) *Letter from Roland Barthes to Mirtha Dermisache*, March 28,1971 [Letter].

¹² Alexander G. Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. p.101.

¹³ Asemic (greek) asemos (ἄσημος) without sign, unmarked, obscure, or ignoble. When writing is characterised as asemic it means using lines and symbols that look like writing, without any meaning.

¹⁴ Black, G. (2021) *Chevron Fantasy*, SET Lewisham, 4.06.2021-10.06.2021 [exhibition press release] London: Self published.

¹⁵ Bruno F. (2018) *On Language and Its Limits: The Illegible Writings of Mirtha Dermisache*. Post (MoMA). [Online]. <https://post.moma.org/on-language-and-its-limits-the-illegible-writings-of-mirtha-dermisache/> (01st February 2025)

¹⁶ Mayer, C. (2024) *Eros and Errors: Andreia Santana*. Galeria Avenida da Índia, 12.04–08.09.2024 [exhibition press release] Lisbon.

¹⁷ Shanzhai Lyric in Schwartz, B. (2023) *Unlicensed: Bootlegging as Creative Practice*. Amsterdam: Valiz.

¹⁸ Comay, R., Ruda, F. (2018) *The Dash—The Other Side of Absolute Knowing*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press.