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Title: Pintxos 1: small delicacies & chance encounters

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Abstract: Jacques Derrida wrote in *Glas* that “The glue of chance creates sense” and he was almost correct. It is, in fact, the toothpick of reading and writing – taken in their most expansive senses – that connects one chance event to another, that binds together, however briefly, the volatility of events. Chance and art: the pleasures of sensuous sensibilities, the distinctions of the conceptual, and the free-flowing sociability of a city as the day rounds almost imperceptibly toward the night. Watch out for the drunken philosophers, poets, and painters; listen for the talking parrots and puppets; beware of the marauding pirates and the red hand-prints on the walls of caves. *Pintxos* is best read in a manner similar to nibbling upon its namesake, tasted bit-by-bit as if one is wandering from one bar to the next along the evening streets of San Sebastian. This is the first part of a two-part installment.

Keywords: Pintxos; art; chance; philosophy; experimental writing

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Pintxos I: small delicacies & chance encounters

Gray Kochhar-Lindgren¹

Abstract

Jacques Derrida wrote in *Glas* that “The glue of chance creates sense” and he was almost correct. It is, in fact, the toothpick of reading and writing – taken in their most expansive senses – that connects one chance event to another, that binds together, however briefly, the volatility of events. Chance and art: the pleasures of sensuous sensibilities, the distinctions of the conceptual, and the free-flowing sociability of a city as the day rounds almost imperceptibly toward the night. Watch out for the drunken philosophers, poets, and painters; listen for the talking parrots and puppets; beware of the marauding pirates and the red hand-prints on the walls of caves. *Pintxos* is best read in a manner similar to nibbling upon its namesake, tasted bit-by-bit as if one is wandering from one bar to the next along the evening streets of San Sebastian. This is the first part of a two-part installment.

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...the glue of chance makes sense...

Jacques Derrida
Glas

Pintxos

Pintxos: small Basque delicacies – fish, meats, olives, cheeses – laid on a thin slice of fresh bread and held together, for the ease and pleasure of eating, with a toothpick. Layered and nuanced flavors, a variety of textures, and the complexities of gustatorial differentiation at work as we leisurely eat our way from bar to bar as the night slowly comes on, deepening our intoxication. Pluralism for the palate, a thin assemblage linked, for an instant, by the puncturing force of the unifying action of a toothpick.

A *pintxo* is a “thorn” or a “spike” and already we have a miniature tool – also, albeit in a slightly different form, known to the Nean-

derthals – that is usually made of wood. Having been transformed from its natural state, the toothpick comes to serve as a mass-produced binding agent for a cultural *bricolage* of tastes and social minglings. Many a romance, the sagas tell us, have begun budding with the smallest of *pintxos*, usually, to be sure, accompanied by a bit of bibulous spirits such as *txikito* or a *zurito*.

Chance and art: the pleasures of the sensuous, the fine distinctions of the conceptual, and the free-flowing sociability of wandering from bar to bar as the day diffuses into the early colors of the evening, the clouds shot with crimson, and then rounds, less perceptibly, toward midnight. What could be better?

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Threads of desire and the transformed meter

Art, like every human and other entity, is the conjunction of chance and causality. In *The Box of 1914* Marcel Duchamp scribbled a very short text that accompanies a photograph of the *Three Standard Stoppages*:

The idea of the fabrication

If a straight horizontal thread one meter long falls from a height of one meter onto a horizontal plane distorting itself *as it pleases* and creates a new shape of the measure of length. (1973, 22)

That's it: as simple as can be. An idea, fabricated. Made-up and made. Three straight threads, each measured precisely as one-meter long, are dropped from one-meter high onto a canvas surface and then adhered into place. Each thread, like a drifting leaf, floats down twisting *as it pleases*. Taking delight in its sinuous movements: chance, caused : causality, by chance.

“This experiment was made in 1913,” Duchamp explained in 1964, “to imprison and preserve forms obtained through chance, through my chance. At the same time, the unit of length, one meter, was changed from a straight line to a curved line without actually losing its identity [as] the meter, and yet casting a pataphysical doubt on the concept of a straight edge as being the shortest route from one point to another” (1973, 273–74).

In 1991, Mme Duchamp gave *The Box of 1914* to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, whose curators include the following descriptions of the work:

Dimensions: Other (Box): 9 13/16 \times 7 7/16 \times 1 3/8 inches (24.9 \times 18.9 \times 3.5 cm) Other (archival box; contains artwork): 10 1/8 \times 7 1/2 \times 1 1/2 inches (25.7

\times 19.1 \times 3.8 cm) Other (archival box; contains empty cardboard box): 10 1/2 \times 8 \times 1 5/8 inches (26.7 \times 20.3 \times 4.1 cm)

The twisting threads moving out their own pleasures redefined the meter – and all the linear geometries of Euclid and Descartes – but, nonetheless, precise measurement remains and remains necessarily efficacious. The fourth-dimension and the *Large Glass* were awaiting. Pataphysics and physics continue to shadow one another.

Other concatenations were, as we know, also occurring in the summer of 1914, including the planned spontaneity of an act of the teenager who shot the [Archduke of Austria](#) and his wife at point blank range in front of a delicatessen. The driver of the convertible had, unfortunately, made an accidental wrong turn. Accidents happen; accidents are matter mattering. Which of these events holds the greater importance?

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Scrapings and shavings

“But now, Socrates,” asked Hippias of Elis, “what do you think all this amounts to? It is mere scrapings and shavings of discourse, as I said a while ago, divided into bits; but that other ability is beautiful and of great worth, the ability to produce a discourse well and beautifully in a court of law or a council-house or before any other public body before which the discourse may be delivered...” (*Hippias Major* 304a). There is always an audience to be considered, but is the beautiful (presumed) whole more intense, more captivating than the scrapings and shavings? What is the relationship between these two concepts: the whole and the left-overs? This will go a long way to determining your metaphysics, and, perhaps, your taste for *pintxos*. I prefer scraps, bits and pieces... saved and shaped for a few nomads: the curious, the quiet. Accidents of discovery. And yet –

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Last words

Chekhov: *Ich sterbe*.

Paula Modersohn-Becker: *What a pity*.

Dave Olney: *I'm sorry*.

An event – and not just any event – and its arrival recognized, acknowledged. A last sentence, exploding with the expiring knowledge that this is it, the end at last in its absolute singularity, its absolute universality. Full stop.

Quasi-cinemas

Cinema, a sense of the motionality of kinematics, has always existed. It is the worlding of the world, always in motion. And it is an abstract diagram of the worlding of the world

that demonstrates the worlding of the world in, as it were, miniature. The cavalcade of charcoal and ochre animals – never surpassed in their artistry – thundering across the shadowed stone walls of the caves of Chauvet; the erotic entwinements at the Temples of Khajuraho; the Balinese puppet shows of shadows in motion; and the Stations of the Cross at the Sacro Monte Calvario overlooking [Domodossola](http://www.domodossola.com). All of these are cinematic movements long before the invention of the technologies of film itself (which could not have been invented if there were not already a concept of the cinematic waiting for actualization). A concept, needless to say, is not transcendentally awaiting actualization in the immanent, but an aspect of immanence that is an aspect of the actualization.

The action entailed by watching the sequencing of the distinct and yet connected images of a film – in whatever technical media it occurs – is “accompanied by a continuous semblance of itself, an ongoing perception of its singular eventfulness doubling the functional perception of the affordances offered and taken. The production of a perception of perception suspending or abstractly doubling action-reaction is an idea that Deleuze develops at length in connection to an older dynamic form in his *Cinema* books” (Massumi 2013 47). Everyday habitual perception; painting-perception; thinking-perception; cinematic-perception: all simply made from the simplest of materials, but all always “an abstractly doubling action-reaction” in which the hyphen indicates an infinity of possibility. An auratic hovering of meaning and its infinite potentiality.

A “semblance is a placeholder in present perception of a potential ‘more’ to life. The framing of it determines the intensity or range of or seriousness of that potential ... the semblance is the leading edge, in the present, of future variation, and at the same time a doppler from variation past” (Massumi 2013, 49). A semblance is a *Doppelgänger* radiating in all directions. It holds

in place the mechanics of the objectivity and subjectivity of perception – we see, touch, hear, smell the ordinary world – but the ordinariness of the ordinary is a miraculous semblance of the not-yet, the yet-to-come, the has-been, the what-if.

Quasi-cinema was thinking before the Lumière Brothers, George Méliès, or Thomas Edison had begun to think the filmic possibilities of the man with the camera. Or the camera with the man, as we might say today, thinking of the reconfiguration of the apparatus of an assemblage. The shadow puppets move a man's hands behind a cotton screen illuminated by a coconut-oil lamp and the present recedes, appears, projects itself outward from the scene. The *Ramayana* speaks. The bison, mammoths, aurochs, rhinoceros, and horses of Chauvet called to a woman deep in the darkness of the cave, lit by a flickering torch, and then – after the surface was smoothed and cleaned – the stone sprang to life through charcoal and began to move across the screens of time. This quasi-cinema waited patiently for 30,000 years before a different demonstration occurred via radiocarbon isotopes, photography, digitization, and film. Every cinema is a quasi-cinema and the next is yet to come.

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Bees on the boulevards

I listen to the swarms of bees that have long been invisibly humming along the boulevards of tomorrow and I pay attention to the quotation marks of the *perhaps*.

On avoiding the glance of death

Perhaps, I thought – quietly and without a sound – if I sit very quietly by myself, be very

still and breathe only as necessary, I will be able to avoid the glance of death? I would be, I assured myself, unobtrusive to the point of a fading visibility, disappearing into the woodwork and into the white wall, shimmering like a wind-burst over water, then vanishing. There is nothing here; no need to come my way. Please don't bother.

Ventriloquism

What does this mean: *to ventriloquize*? To copy, to speak in the voice of another, to use artifice as if it is the natural voice. What is a natural voice? Isn't ventriloquism simply what "learning language" means? We babble and vocalize, shape our sounds to copy the sounds of others, the giants, that hover above us from such a great height. Then, close and warm, we hear other sounds and our gurglings tend toward words, distinct and linked in a syntax. We speak in the voices, tongues, and languages given to us and this basic form of schooling must occur if learning is to occur. (Other trajectories are opened by the hard-of-hearing, the Deaf, and the blind.)

We speak of a ventriloquist's *dummy*, but who is pulling whose strings? Who speaks to whom and through whose mouth? What calls went forth? What did the wood say and what is the sartorial style of the dummy, which has called forth the discipline of a camouflaged language in a manner that is uncanny and comic. One speaks who is not speaking; one who is incapable of speech, speaks. The dumb speak.

The profound entanglement of the history of ontological distinctions is visibly compressed in this exchange – back and forth – between the "human" and the "dummy": between the mute thing and the rational animal who speaks; between the inanimate and the animate, the dead and the living; between the natural and the artificial. Speaking occurs from both positionalities and only in the between of a network of material exchange. Air, flesh, and wood move:

language languages.

Yes, but. Only the human, surely, can be the *source* of language, the *origin* of speech? A one-way street? This belief arises only recently with the anthro-centrism of a form of modernity constructed on a particular interpretive capture of the mono-theological platforms of antiquity. And there it is the Divine, not the human, who speaks speaking into being. The “let-there-be” and the appearance of the light of the totality of beings depends, in these traditions – which are multiplex – on a speaking-forth that emerges with languaging: (John 1:1). Eve and Adam before they set up house “near riverrun...*from swerve of shore to bend of bay*” (Joyce, 1939, 1) must have gone to school to learn their letters. “Now children, be careful, don’t, whatever you do...” and have been always already placed in a dialogical situation. We are now, once again, breaking forth from the closed circuits of an anthropocentric language to thinking expressivities when the *geo-* and the *bios-* return with a difference.

Language *circulates*; it does not begin in a pointillist or punctual manner. It drifts, swirls, tumbles thunderously down the cosmic crevasses and whispers quietly, inaudible, in the deepening night. Murmuring.

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Knots, momentum

Where, when, and how do the knots appear within our own writing *as* we write, and, later, as we (re)read what we, presumably, have written? How can we use the knotting and un-knotting to propel the writing forward into an

unpredictable future? How does the knotting *use us* to propel itself forward?

Flavoring the night

The polychromatic universe is always tumbling along, cavorting with itself as it twists and turns. Infinite power and the power of infinity. As it erodes and abrades each thing, each of us, we are able, just barely if at all, to incorporate a piece of the night, to chew upon it slowly and arduously, and then, if we are lucky, swallow a morsel of the night. It will blast each of us, each of everything, utterly apart. What, then, is our task? To release the night back into the world, but now as a night ever so slightly, in an infinitesimal manner, changed. Each of us, for an instant of however long a duration, is a scent, a flavor of the night before we dissipate. Why, then, bother? To become acquainted with the night, to leave the slightest of after-tastes. To, on occasion, perhaps, sense in the great distance that cannot be perceived or held, the daying of the day, the nighting of the night.

Parrots

As Sue Farlow wrote, according to the Beach Comber, about Alexander von Humboldt’s encounter with a parrot who was the last speaker of an almost lost language:

According to legend, famed 18th-century explorer and naturalist Alexander von Humboldt was traveling along the Orinoco River in what is now Venezuela when he happened upon a Carib Indian tribe. When he asked his hosts why their pet parrots were speaking a dialect different from their own language, the Indians told von Humboldt the birds had belonged to the Maypure tribe, whom they had recently exterminated during tribal warfare. The birds were spoils of war. To von Humboldt’s amazement, the

parrots were the last remaining speakers of the Maypure language. von Humboldt's meticulously detailed journals don't corroborate the legend of the parrots, unfortunately. However, they do contain the Maypure words he heard on his travels, transcribed phonetically since Maypure existed only in spoken form. ([The Parrots of the Atures – Beachcombing's Bizarre History Blog: strangehistory.net](#))

Here is what von Humboldt's journal records: "A tradition circulates among the Guahiboos, that the warlike Atures, pursued by the Caribbees, escaped to the rocks that rise in the middle of the Great Cataracts; and there that nation, hear-to-fore so numerous, became gradually extinct, as well as its language. The last families of the Atures still existed in 1767, in the time of the missionary Gili. At the period of our voyage an old parrot was shown at Maypures, of which the inhabitants related, and the fact is worthy of observation that 'they did not understand what it said, because it spoke the language of the Atures' [Vol. 5, 620]. The language that was passed down had become pure nonsense, sound without meaning, since there were no more active speakers – it takes a least one who, like all of us, is simultaneously a speaker and a hearer split into a communicative loop – and there were no recording devices to preserve the community of speakers. A parrot repeats, but, not understanding, cannot *explain* the language or *invent* in order to expand the language.

Since Humboldt's time, however, there have recently emerged are even more internationally famous parrots. Alex the African Grey Parrot (May 1976 – 6 September 2007) trained professors Irene Pepperberg and Dianne Patterson to train him in order to study his language and mathematical capacities. Learning a variety of terms, how to recognize and distinguish objects, and the basics of counting – perhaps even the concept of zero – and occasionally

correcting his instructors (which are always the best kind of students), Alex also had the rudiments of a concept of self as he entered the Lacanian mirror-stage. "Looking at a mirror, he said 'what color,' and learned 'gray' after being told 'grey' six times. This made him the first and only non-human animal to have ever asked a question – and an existential question at that" (Wikipedia, Alex). A gray on gray, after only six attempts. Not bad. We do not know, unfortunately, what his ultimate capacities would have been after entered the stage of the symbolic, as he passed away at the early age of 31. His last words, the ones he always said last to Pepperberg as she departed, were "You be good, I love you. See you tomorrow." These sentiments will be echoed by countless human beings, including Socrates in the *Crito*. "You be good, I love you. See you tomorrow."

Another famous parroteer, although not a parrot, is Laurie Anderson, the performance artist who is deeply intrigued by the voice animalized or artificialized – but be careful with these distinctions – and separated from the "normal common sense" figure of the body. As she has noted:

As a talking artist, I'm always on the lookout for alter egos – surrogate speakers. And I've always been completely fascinated by parrots. . . . I spent a lot of time with my brother's gray African parrot Uncle Bob. Uncle Bob has a vocabulary of about five hundred words. You're never sure with Bob where the line is between repetitive babble and conscious communication. [Isn't this precisely the same question for those commonly known as "human beings"?] The more I listened to Bob the more it seemed like he could communicate emotion – cries and phrases that expressed loneliness, fear, sheer happiness – all with his extremely limited vocabulary. It made me realize how much human language is a combination of rote phrases and

fortuitous invention, a complex mix of the things that can be said and the unsayable. (“Control rooms”, 128)

Uncle Bob, like any self-respecting linguistic genius, has his own website, where you can hear him speak. “Lobster” is my favorite example, since lobsters explain the double-articulation of materiality-expressivity always at work in the world.

And what a concept: the “alter-ego – surrogate speakers ...”. Repetition and difference are always at work, variations of tone, pacing, vocabulary and syntax that shape the space for the emergence of meaning and whatever arrives that is unexpected, not part of the program. The “I” of the *ego* depends, in an essential manner, on its innumerable *alters* – in an infinite ecology of expressivity. Surrogates; technologies. Who do we speak on behalf of? Who, and what, speaks on our behalf?

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Sunshine

Emily Dickinson reminds us:

Time does go on –
I tell it gay to those who suffer now –
They shall survive –
There is a sun –
They don’t believe it now –

(1121)

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Gray zones, blurriness

Gray zone in the morning was Durs Grünbein’s first collection of poems. As he says of them, “In their own bashful and clumsy way, they were all dawn songs hailing from the gray everyday of socialism... Most of them were fairly blurry, black-and-white affairs... restless, looking for something palpable even in their layout...” (2010, 26). The blurred looking restlessly for a layout that creates a palpability, a viscosity of words. Green legs striding across the dullness of a socialist empire of a grayness that is broken, like the flutter of unexpected wings, by dawn-songs.

Wittgenstein, in *Philosophical investigations*, also muses on blurriness:

One might say that the concept ‘game’ is a concept with blurred edges – “But is a blurred concept a concept at all?” – Is an indistinct photograph a picture of a person at all? Is it even always an advantage to replace an indistinct picture by a sharp one? Isn’t the indistinct one often exactly what we need? (§71).

The vagaries of the vagueness of the indistinct provides a necessary background formed by

chance for the emergence of the dark precursors from which the brilliant precision of experience can emerge, flare for and as an instant, and then dissipate in the currents of the high winds.

“And this is the position you are in if you look for definitions corresponding to our concepts in aesthetics or ethics,” Wittgenstein continues. “In such a difficulty always ask yourself: How did we learn the meaning of this word (‘good’ for instance)? From what sort of examples? in what language-games? Then it will be easier for you to see that the word must have a family of meanings” (§77). In ethics and aesthetics – the entirety of the range of experience – one can never settle on a definition of the “good,” of “beauty,” of “value.” They remain incessantly in play, a blur of thought and sensation.

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A slice of the sea

Out of the flat’s narrow back window is a slice of the sea – wrinkling blues, grays, and greens – backed by the darker green and folded hills of Lamma Island. The light is sharp, the sea and the beige edge of the shore are close enough to touch. The high and lazy white clouds of June. Many of my neighbors have a “panorama” view of the sea, an overview that reaches past Cheung Chau towards Macau, with the high ridges of Lantau, with its gorgeous sunsets sending streaming rays of the disappearing star, providing a scenic backdrop at the edge of a frame. “Theatrical distances, bronze shadows heaped/On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres/Of

sky and sea.” Perfect for photography. Disneyland, Discovery Bay, Mui On, and the invisible airport, constructed on land reclaimed from the sea, which now very quiet. The air is clear; the water less muddied. Panoramic views are valuable since a view=money, but only a wide-screen view in technicolor is worth a precise calculation. “Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,/And of ourselves and of our origins,/In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.” A slice of the sea, just a glimpse? We only want the whole, the whole view and the whole of life. We want to master the view, be the overlord of vision. Since we cannot be masters of the whole, this creates bitterness, rage, and grief. A glimpse of the sea, however, grants us a different rhythm and resonates with the entirety of becoming. The glimpse is the rippling of the spacetime field that we call *possibility*.

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Threnody

All song is a memorial to the haunting absence present in a diaphanous form, of the dead in our midst. The dead and our singing course along the entire nervure of the physiognomy of the veins that nourish each experiment, micro- or cosmic, that is a life, that is life.

Khurbn

I did not know this word until I learned of it. Relentless, destruction.

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A small chance

November 7, 2020: Democracy, once again, has a chance in the United States, a small chance to be sure, but at least there is now another opening. We must learn to be democrats with a small “d,” practitioners of the recondite and occult arts of negotiation, compromise, historical intelligence, and political inventiveness. We must learn to form coalitions, make use of all our know-how, and address *everyone’s* everyday needs. As we accomplish this, a tall order easily derailed, we are simultaneously creating an arabesque of the existential flair necessary for the flourishing of communal life. *Possibilities*. There is no “hierarchy” of needs; everyone needs everything as dying accompanies our ownmost collective contouring that, in its turn, includes each and every dappled thing through which the cosmos expresses itself. We must become *cosmo-politans* again, but now with a different twist that more thoroughly thinks, and inhabits, the *cosmos*. A different democ-

racy.

Nose-Picking

We have lost, in this era of cynical and self-serving techno-narcissism, the art of nose-picking, and what an inestimable loss this is. We have lost a moment of self-scrutiny about the relations between inside and outside, individuality and the non-conscious, and, indeed, the decomposition inherent in finitude. As Iris Murdoch mused in her journals, Shakespeare continues to intrigue us because he was a “cheerful, nose-picking whoremaster” (cited in Garner). What, we might wonder and no doubt with profit, is the relationship between good cheer, nose-picking, and an inimitably *Shakespearean* whoremastering as playwrighting?

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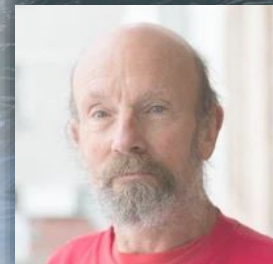
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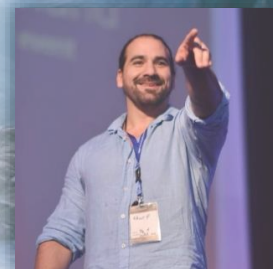
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