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Breaking Up, Down and Out: Anomie in Georgi Gospodinov's *Natural Novel*

MIHAELA P. HARPER

'And what will happen if words dispullulated.'
Georgi Gospodinov

IN the 'Beginning' of a compact, but remarkably rich publication, entitled *Georgi Gospodinov: Razroiavania*, Albena Hranova writes:

Now I would like to speak of *razroiavania*, of their implacability and their snug comfort, of the power that moves them and of its coming to a halt, of the ideologies and the emotions, of the semiotics and panspermias, of Anaxagoras and Alzheimer, of the capacity to discourse and of language in general, of remaining and of journeying.¹

Her critical remarks pertain to the works of arguably the most prominent contemporary Bulgarian author, Georgi Gospodinov; they constitute an effort to unfold — with minimal immobilization and reduction — the multiplicitous, paradoxical complexities of peculiar (inter- and intra-) textual events that she nominates *razroiavania* — a word strange even in its native Bulgarian language. A composite of the prefix 'raz-' and a form of the verbal noun *roene*, the singular, *razroiavane*, encompasses all of the senses of 'pullulating' — engendering, germinating, swarming,

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¹ Albena Hranova, *Georgi Gospodinov: Razroiavania*, Plovdiv, 2004, p. 4. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the Bulgarian are my own.

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multiplying and reproducing prolifically² — but with a connotative gesture towards the activity of a beehive, primarily to incessant swarming and hatching of an infinite quantity. While *roene* captures this activity in the immediate process of its being carried out, as Vyara Istratkova points out, ‘raz-’ implies simultaneously ‘to do in excess, to the very end, [and] in many directions’,³ each of which contributes a variety of nuances to ‘pullulating’. But ‘raz-’ also bears the contradictory senses of beginning and undoing, a paradox that bespeaks the start of an excessive action and its simultaneous dissolution. Joining linguist Teodora Kurteva in her assertion that ‘raz-’ is perpetually haunted by the totality that it endeavours to break, I add that — particularly in the case of *razroiavane* — the prefix actively destabilizes (seeking to do so to a terminal degree) the immanent organizing or totalizing forces at work in the base ‘pullulation’.

The closest translation of ‘raz-’, the prefix ‘dis-’, invokes the modifiers asunder, apart and away, between and singly. It points to oppositions and acts as an intensifier. Thus, ‘dispullulations’ most accurately signals the forced relations in *razroiavania* that destabilize chronology and linearity. This disruption occurs because, in their plurality, dispullulations reproduce themselves with an intensity that involves both germination and disintegration, but makes the two indistinguishable. In a similar gesture, dispullulations undermine spatial parameters. They constitute swarmings simultaneously drawing entities together and breaking them apart, because their constitutive components move towards, against, with and away from each other at the same time. Precisely these emergences of creative and destructive operations, inhering in the tension between the prefix and the base of dispullulation, I argue, constitute the movements of *anomie*, premised upon a fundamental uncertainty.

A Generative Anomie

To understand *anomie* not as a situation but as movements, not as a social or a psychological condition, but rather as a condition of *novel* possibilities, requires a consideration of the conventional and current uses of this term, itself a site of much interest and interdisciplinary conversation. According to sociologist Mathieu Deflem, the use of the term *anomie* reached its peak sixty years after Émile Durkheim introduced it into social theory

² ‘Pullulation, *n.*’, *OED Online*, September 2007 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/154356?redirectedFrom=pullulation#eid>> [accessed 15 September 2010].

³ Vyara Istratkova, ‘On Multiple Prefixation in Bulgarian’, special issue on Slavic Prefixes, in Peter Svenonius (ed.), *Nordlyd*, 32, 2004, 2, pp. 301–21 (p. 312) <<http://septentrio.uit.no/index.php/nordlyd/article/view/71/67>> [accessed 18 September 2010].

discourse. Deflem writes that, 'theoretically, anomie was perceived among non-Marxists as a useful alternative to alienation',⁴ though, gradually, the concept fell into disuse. In the late 1980s, however, following the collapse of Communist regimes, the term re-emerged. At the time, the countries comprising the former Eastern blok appeared as stark illustrations of the already dominant negative connotations ascribed to anomie, indicating primarily individual or social breakdown.⁵ The drastic changes to the economic, political and social systems of former Communist countries, and, more specifically, the subsequent crises — absence of electricity, basic food items and employment opportunities, in addition to the debilitating instability of juridical systems, all staples of post-Communist situations — gave anomie new currency. Conditions at that time seemed to fit the diagnosis perfectly; yet, according to current social theories, anomie appositely describes 'the condition' of post-Communist countries, such as Georgi Gospodinov's native Bulgaria, even now.

After 1989, Bulgarian social structure and the psychosocial state of its population have been frequently either identified as anomic or evaluated in terms of anomie. In his 1998 'Transformations and Anomie: Problems of Quality of Life in Bulgaria', social theorist Nikolai Genov subscribes to Wolfgang Glatzer's premise that 'all Central and Eastern European countries experienced anomic developments after 1989'.⁶ Genov proposes that 'The transformation of Bulgarian society after 1989 is a telling example of [a] situation marked by a high intensity of risks causing anomie or caused by it'.⁷ Similarly, a number of social scientists, who work with post-Communist social systems, utilize anomie as a paradigm to speak of the breakdown of moral norms and social regulations;⁸ of a period of normlessness between 'the end of the old social system and its replacement

⁴ Mathieu Deflem, 'Anomie', in George Ritzer (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, Oxford, 2007, pp. 144–46 (p. 145).

⁵ Among the senses of anomie are fragmentation; disintegration of social bonds, opportunities and communal values; deregulation; restlessness; and uncertainty. Specifically, under the entry *anomy* (an alternative spelling), the Oxford English Dictionary offers two definitions: 'disregard of law, lawlessness; esp. (in 17th-c. theology) disregard of divine law', and 'absence of accepted social standards or values; the state or condition of an individual or society lacking such standards', based on Durkheim's articulation and use of the term.

⁶ Nikolai Genov, 'Transformation and Anomie: Problems of Quality of Life in Bulgaria', *Social Indicators Research*, 43, 1998, 1/2, pp. 197–209 (p. 197).

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

⁸ Sijka Kovatcheva, 'The European Identity of the New Generation of Bulgarian Students in a Comparative Perspective', in P. E. Mitev (ed.), *Bulgarian Youth Facing Europe*, Sofia, 1999, pp. 45–62.

by a new one', when, 'as a result of anomie, whether in the Durkheimian or the Mertonian mould, people may feel a lack of orientation, uncertainty, powerlessness, loneliness and psychological discomfort';⁹ as well as of 'fundamental political and economic changes [and] the unintended consequence of those changes: a societal state of disorder'.¹⁰

Others, however, contend that there are significant problems with regard to the perhaps too obviously fitting, conventional ways in which post-Communist situations are conceptualized. Notably, Maria Todorova implies that anomie cannot be identified strictly with a ruinous malaise,¹¹ unlike Genov, who finds novelty, or rather collective 'cultural and institutional innovation',¹² to be a necessary antidote to the effects of anomie (disintegration and deterioration). Herein, however, lies the paradoxical correspondence between anomie and newness. Though Genov's conception exposes the relation between a state of anomie and change or novelty, a possibility for affirmation, inhering in anomie's destructivity and necessarily entwined with disintegration, is not explicitly proposed. The complex and problematic interpenetration, as I read it, nevertheless, informs the simultaneous precariousness of anomie and the vital significance of its productive activity. Unlike Durkheim, who originally theorized anomie as an effect of change, I suggest that anomie operates as a movement of change, as change itself, always at work in the relations of forces that forge subjectivities — a fragmentation that renders available self-transformation, as Georgi Gospodinov's *Estestven Roman* (*Natural Novel*, 1999) reveals.

Articulating the relation between anomie and change ineluctably compels rethinking the compartmentalization of time into past, present and future. In 'The Past Is Now', Eric Méchoulan proposes that 'anomie and depression set in when the past offers no more surprises (for in reality my present is empty and my future is inoperative); then the past becomes a burden and a lack rather than a richness and a desire'.¹³ He adds that 'It's

⁹ Dimiter Philipov, Zsolt Spéder and Francesco C. Billari, 'Soon, Later, Or Ever? The Impact of Anomie and Social Capital on Fertility Intentions in Bulgaria (2002) and Hungary (2001)', *Population Studies*, 60, 2006, 3, pp. 289–308 (p. 293).

¹⁰ Wil Arts, Piet Hermkens and Peter van Wijck, 'Anomie, Distributive Injustice and Dissatisfaction with Material Well-Being in Eastern Europe: A Comparative Study', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 1995, pp. 1–16 (p. 1).

¹¹ Maria Todorova, 'The Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov as *lieu de mémoire*', *The Journal of Modern History*, 78, 2006, 2, pp. 377–411 (p. 380).

¹² Genov, 'Transformation and Anomie', p. 197.

¹³ Eric Méchoulan and Roxanne Lapidus, 'The Past is Now', *SubStance*, 32, 2003, 1, pp. 40–43 (p. 40).

not the future that amazes me in the present that leads to it; rather, it is the past that surprises in the future that I discover'.¹⁴ Méchoulan's point is significant to thinking anomie anew in that it anticipates the problem of time, more precisely, of a 'finished' past, to self-conception. Anomie's 'setting in', I contend, enables re-positioning 'the past' from an immutable solid that grounds the self to a finite set of elements — memories, desires, dreams — perpetually dispullulating into infinite combinations. *Natural Novel*, the literary text that sustains this assertion, exposes the play of destructive and creative forces, interpenetrating to indistinguishability, in anomie.

A winner of the National Contest 'Development' in manuscript form and the Bulgarian Award for Best First Novel, Gospodinov's text has sustained readership interest both in Bulgaria and abroad. Available in English (and many other languages) since 2005,¹⁵ in 2014 *Natural Novel* appeared also in Icelandic, becoming the first Bulgarian literary work to be offered in Iceland,¹⁶ and was added to *LibraryThing's* list of the twenty best Eastern European novels of the twentieth century. In Bulgaria, the book has been reissued ten times. Its last, special edition, released in December 2014, marks the fifteenth year since the text first appeared in print. In the foreword that it features, Gospodinov claims that the book 'would not have been possible in any other decade but the 90s. [...] With love and revulsion, this novel is dedicated to the 90s. And grateful'.¹⁷ The special edition also includes an essay by Boyko Penchev in which he seeks 'the secret of this "lucky book"', examining both what it is about *Natural Novel* that impresses global media so powerfully and why foreign critics compare Gospodinov to 'Kundera, Borges, Tarantino, Pessoa, Paul Auster and others'.¹⁸ As *Dnevnik* indicates, 'Many claim that [*Natural Novel's*] appearance in 1999 commenced the return of the reader to contemporary Bulgarian literature and not only in the country — since then it has been

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ *Natural Novel* appeared in English from Dalkey Archive Press in 2005.

¹⁶ *News.bg*, 'Gospodinov "probi" Severa s "Estestven roman," pokazva v Sofia "I vsichko stana luna"' ('Gospodinov "Broke Through" the North with *Natural Novel*, reveals in Sofia *And Everything Became Moon*'), 10 October 2013 <http://news.ibox.bg/news/id_448307457> [accessed 15 October 2013].

¹⁷ *Dnevnik*, 'Estestven roman: niakolko dumi 15 godini po-kasno' ('Natural Novel: A Few Words 15 Years Later'), 16 December 2014 <http://www.dnevnik.bg/razvlechenie/2014/12/16/2438540__estestven_roman_niakolko_dumi_15_godini_po-kusno/> [accessed 2 January 2015].

¹⁸ *News.bg*, 'Estestven roman — 15 godini i 10 izdania po-kasno' ('Natural Novel — 15 Years and 10 Editions Later'), 9 December 2014 <http://news.ibox.bg/news/id_1163283129> [accessed 18 December 2014].

released in over 30 countries around the world, which makes it the most translated contemporary Bulgarian novel'.¹⁹ The enduring interest in this text points to its relevance even now, twenty-six years after the fall of Communism, when the 'crisis' seemingly endemic to former Communist countries has not only not abated, but rather seems to re-emerge with an obstinate regularity.²⁰ This is especially true for Bulgaria in 2013, considering that, for many months, the population of numerous cities went out into the streets to protest the low standard of living, the financial impossibility of paying for heat and electricity and the policies of the government that led to major economic problems. Asked whether he is concerned that some of his readers may not like that he, too, was in the streets protesting, Gospodinov replied:

There are moments when you cannot but react, whatever it may cost you. I have always thought that literature must be on the side of the vulnerable. To examine the unspoken sorrows, the invisible crises — personal and collective, to react. Sometimes we have to trust our taste as well. When something in our collective living is repulsive, causing disgust, it is necessary to react, to leave, to declare a position. In such times aesthetics and ethics are linked. [...] Let's remember finally that the weightiest words regarding that which is Bulgarian are said by poets such as Botev, Yavorov and even Vazov. The final stanza of 'Homeland Dear' is 'and we in you, mother, will die strangers'. This sensation of being a stranger in your own country became especially unbearable in the last ten years or so. But I think that the reading people in Bulgaria understand all of this very well.²¹

Gospodinov is hailed as the most successful and most translated,²² as well as most read²³ contemporary Bulgarian writer. The reasons for this

¹⁹ *Dnevnik*, 'Estestven roman: niakolko dumi 15 godini po-kāsno'.

²⁰ I envision here primarily the US recession of the last few years, the collapse of the Greek economy that became a global EU concern, but also various violent eruptions, such as the riots in Greece and France in 2005 and 2008 particularly.

²¹ Rumen Leonidov, 'Ima momenti, kogato ne moga da ne reagiram, kakvoto i da mi struva tova' ('There are moments when I cannot but react, whatever that may cost me'), *Fakel*, 25 August 2013 <<http://www.fakel.bg/index.php?t=2921>> [accessed 9 September 2013].

²² Mila Vacheva, 'Nai-prevejdaniat v chujbina bālgarski pisatel Georgi Gospodinov mechtael da stane gradinar ili pchelar' ('The most translated abroad Bulgarian writer Georgi Gospodinov dreamt of becoming a gardener or a beekeeper'), *24 Hours*, 25 January 2014, <<http://www.24chasa.bg/Article.asp?ArticleId=3048462>> [accessed 29 December 2014].

²³ Maria Nesterova, 'Georgi Gospodinov — nai-chetenyat sāvremenen avtor v Stolichnata biblioteka' ('Georgi Gospodinov — The Most Read Contemporary Author at

are manifold; from being published by Janet 45, a press that established itself since the 1990s as one of the key supporters of Bulgarian literature,²⁴ to keeping in close contact with the reading public, as Sofia Library director Julia Tsinzova explains Gospodinov's popularity.²⁵ His many works — poetic, fictional and scholarly, and especially his projects between 2004 and 2006 — exhibit a troubled and troubling strain to define the 'fall' of Communism in Bulgaria and the challenging complexities of *writing* change. His texts problematize the momentous tensions between discontinuity (event) and continuity (mechanization), breaking open the surface of a past that is impossible to share and, yet, is shared precisely in this impossibility. His fiction struggles with an awareness of its own inability to fully turn on itself, to articulate the operations of re-constructing 'the' past or of capturing 'the' *eventality*²⁶ of events. Haunted particularly by the problem of time, of change and of the living, lingual self, it excavates commonly adopted material forms of time and being, and opens them to critique, deploying movements that draw familiar shapes closer to a radical uncertainty and an unpredictable futurity. Importantly, his writing enacts dispullulations, movements of anomie, and insists on going further into uncertainty, on opening the past not in order to understand it better, but rather to inhabit the impossibility of doing so and, thus, to break it into different subjectivities and new futures. Gospodinov's interrogation of life prior to 1989, as well as of the years since, evinces also an immanent concern for the 'Bulgarian self' of the future, for subjectivities of different orders — ones that move in fractures, that open through ceaseless dissolution of their selves against the background of that which they perceive and own as their past. But the dependency of the constitution of these subjectivities on the conception of time, change and language, necessitates a kind of archaeological re-examination of relations that, I propose, Gospodinov embarks upon compellingly in *Natural Novel*. It is this particular text

the Sofia Library'), *Dnes. bg*, 18 December 2014, <<http://www.dnes.bg/knigi/2014/12/18/georgi-gospodinov-nai-chetenniat-syvremen-en-avtor-v-stolichnata-biblioteka.248825>> [accessed 22 Dec. 2014].

²⁴ *Serious* is the term that comes to mind when seeking to identify the kind of press that is Janet 45. As their site points out, 'During the 1990s **Janet 45** gradually earned itself a reputation as the foremost publisher of contemporary Bulgarian literature. In a period of rapidly changing values, characterized by the influx of "light reading" — erotic literature, thrillers and books on the occult dominated the Bulgarian book market for an entire decade, while the works of a whole generation of Bulgarian writers were subjected to total neglect — **Janet 45** was running on a different track'. <<http://printing.janet45.com/>>.

²⁵ Nesterova, 'Georgi Gospodinov'.

²⁶ In the Deleuzian sense of becoming and of relations between movements happening to us unawares, rather than of actual or identifiable outcomes.

that invents dispullulations as multiplicitous movements of anomie by deploying fragmentations, dwelling in the shifting contours of pieces impossible to fit together, and refracting apparent unities to a point of disappearance.

A Compound Eye/I: Drawing Together Splitting Up

Though the text does not reference directly the notions of anomie, Communism, or post-Communism, *Natural Novel* invokes each of them through the fragmentations, recollections and dispullulations that it embodies. Particularly because of the ways in which it moves simultaneously in a multitude of directions, the novel itself makes it difficult to dissociate literary elements — narrative perspectives from one another, characters from structure. It resists chronological and causal relations, founding these very problematizations and resistances on senses of disorientation, failure, loss and meaninglessness — in other words, on conditions that fit the conventional definitions of anomie. Thus to read *Natural Novel* as an expression of disillusionment, born from the first post-Communist decade, is by all means legitimate, providing the assumption that the thematic content — divorce, death, insanity, loneliness, homelessness — manifests solely as disillusionment is granted.

As if mirroring the fragmented structure of the text, the characters in *Natural Novel*, open onto each other, break against the other/s and seek an exit in but also from one another. The first narrator that the reader meets is a writer, who is getting divorced and whose wife is pregnant with someone else's child. The sections of the text that he narrates include reflections on the years of his marriage; his dreams and short stories; conversations about flies, a particular fly 'M' and the restroom as an unclaimed, exclusive space (*oikeion*);²⁷ in addition to fragments of conversations on which he eavesdropped. The second narrator is the editor of a newspaper, also getting divorced. He receives the manuscript of the first speaker's story, decides to find him (because the latter lives homelessly) and speaks with his former wife, but, later on in the text, he discusses inventing a 'bum', a homeless character, who is a writer. He determines that to make the story of the invented character even more realistic, he would have to become homeless himself, and so he does. The third narrator is a variant of the first and of the second, called the Naturalist and obsessed with seeking a new language and preventing an immanent apocalypse, the result of massive energy released by the complete separation of words and things. He arrives

²⁷ Georgi Gospodinov, *Estestven Roman* (Natural Novel), 6th edn, Plovdiv, 2007, p. 50.

in a remote village, having purchased a house with a large garden that he begins to cultivate by growing plants that had never been seen before. He sends one telegram and one letter every week, always to the same addresses, until one day he attempts to send a telegram that states 'I am dead'.²⁸ A few days later, a woman and her daughter arrive to bury him, their elusive figures reminding the reader of the first narrator's wife and her child.

The split of the name Georgi Gospodinov between the characters occurs early in the text: 'I asked him his name. "Georgi Gospodinov." "That's my name," I almost screamed. "I know" he shrugged, unmoved.'²⁹ The exchange points to the opening of a fissure in-between an 'almost scream' and an immobility (immovability), where the hyper-emotive and the apathetic become indistinguishable, both as instants of simultaneous extreme tension and paralysis, each of which inheres in anomie. The multiplication of the name — a dispullulation, in that the name germinates and moves in multiple directions — is not the first gesture to perform the text's drawing further into uncertainty; but this drawing itself is a course that can be defined neither as progressive, nor as linear. Rather, precisely the discontinuity of the breakages unhinges stability, eradicates security and refuses the familiar, the entanglement with which could perhaps end only in complete diffusion, disappearance. According to Milena Kirova, the novel's 'play with incapability-and-impossibility for totalities' *qua* the 'invisible paradoxical need of totalities, of givens, of stable structures [...] gives rise to the implicit nostalgia of the text. [...] It seems as if therein lies the key to the success of this "novel": it is "natural" while at the same time intimating the unnatural nature of this/of every naturalness; we are (post)modern, but we pay the price for this position'.³⁰ Much has been written with regard to the text's postmodernity, especially since it invokes a number of the features identified by Fredric Jameson and Ihab Hassan as postmodern (some of them discussed later on), and references Jean-François Lyotard directly. At the same time, the text is engaged both in a Derridean deconstruction and a Deleuzian becoming, the latter of which — via the dispullulations enacted — this article takes as the novel's critical ontology, resisting the urge to label it postmodern.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 102.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

³⁰ Milena Kirova, 'Novata romannost — construirane na estestvenoto' ('The New Novelness — Construing the Natural'), *Kriticheska värtelezhka 1995–2001: Beletristika* (Critical Merry-Go-Round 1995–2001: Belletrism), *Kritika na preloma* (Critique of the Rupture), *Slovoto Virtual Library*, 2002 <<http://www.slovo.bg/showwork.php3?AuID=109&WorkID=5577&Level=3>> [accessed 5 October 2013].

To extend Kirova's argument, *Natural Novel* navigates language with extreme care, or rather turns to language and against language, especially with regard to the application of conventional definitions, such as 'natural' and 'unnatural', to effortless reductions to a signifier, to being easily pinned down to one position or another. Questioning the capacity of a text to go as far as complete disintegration, the novel, nevertheless, probes the surface of language for an exit other than that. The experiment is performed by a chapter, titled '∨', but it is also echoed by a seemingly offhand suggestion that 'the exit was hidden in a grammatical error'.³¹ The particular 'exit' referenced in the quote, however, is not solely the literal conclusion to a children's syllogistic language game, involving a play on pronouns and verb forms, in which the narrator participated. Implicated in the reference is also a similar kind of play that *Natural Novel* enacts on a difference scale. The statement itself reverberates another story fragment, told by the narrator-writer, for whom the grammatical error constitutes the difference between an 'i' and an 'e',³² ('nishto') nothing and ('neshto') something, his misreading of a single crucial letter in a note when he was a young boy. But it is also the difference between an 'i' that in Bulgarian stands for *and*, and an 'e' that constitutes *is*, which is to say, an 'and' as a multiplicitous drawing further into nothing (*nishto*), and an immobilizing 'is' of something (*neshto*). Suspended between conjunction and being, between syntax and ontology, the (dis)organizing error, thus, both challenges and subverts the grammatical structure instantaneously, while already reproducing its principles.

Dimitar Kamburov articulates deftly the 'exiting' of *Natural Novel*: 'It appears to me that the greatest question of this novel, as well as of many other things that have occurred in contemporary Bulgarian literature, concerns the way in which we can happen outside of ourselves.'³³ The text's engagement with this significant philosophical problem is not surprising, since it is a text with overt theoretical interests, as a number of critics have noted. But its engagement with the problem also speaks to my argument, because even before Jean-Marie Guyau's articulation of 'moral anomy' in the nineteenth century, anomie constituted both exit-seeking and

³¹ Gospodinov, *Natural Novel*, p. 121.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 69.

³³ Dimitar Kamburov, 'Estestven roman — sedem godini i osem ezika po-käsno' ('Natural Novel — Seven Years and Eight Languages Later'), Tsentär za kultura i debati 'Chervenata käshta' (Centre for culture and debates 'The Red House'), *Liternet.bg* (Sofia), 13 April 2006 <<http://liternet.bg/publish2/anonim/ggospodinov.htm>> [accessed 26 September 2013].

exiting (the self).³⁴ One of the playful movements of anomie in *Natural Novel* pertains to the fragmented narrators, and, more specifically, to the interchangeability of their differentiating elements, their belongings: while the cat and wicker rocking chair with which the first narrator is continuously associated suddenly become the Naturalist's possessions when he arrives in the small village, the former's childhood memories and stories become the second narrator's. Thus, almost imperceptibly, the boundaries between memories and stories blur, fictionalizing — that is destabilizing and making uncertain — the very notion of a self that is stabilized by a foundation of associations with objects and memories, with a past.

This particular interchangeability can be seen in the play on the senses of the Bulgarian word *istoria*, meaning both history and story, a play that also tethers natural history and natural novel. 'The world is one', a Gospodinov narrator says, 'and the novel is that which puts it together. The beginnings are given, the composites are infinite. Each of the characters is free from the predetermination of their *history/story*.'³⁵ While it seems as if the narrator is suggesting that the existence of infinite beginnings makes the freedom of the characters possible, in fact, the proposition points both to the 'givenness' of beginnings and to the critical part that movement plays — the movement of the elementary particles of these beginnings as they enter perpetually into new assemblages. The resistance to or freeing from the predetermination or immobilization of a narrator's own history/story, his temporality and self-articulation, lies precisely in the activity of drawing new lines, composing novel fusions and mapping new territories, necessarily premised on uncertainty. In this sense, *Natural Novel* seeks to wrest anomie from order and experiment with the affirmative force immanent to anomie, to disorientation, meaninglessness and impasses. In this experiment, the visible differences among the narrators are interposed, their distinguishing qualities blur into infinite combinations as they simulate and differentiate from — or, as Dobromir Grigorov describes it, 'metastasize' into — each other.³⁶ Obliterating the possibility of identifying an original, *Natural Novel* makes it impossible to

³⁴ One might consider its ancient Greek definition as lawlessness and the use of the term *anomia* in the New Testament to indicate iniquity, both pointing to the place of anomie's activity outside of boundaries (the boundaries of the law especially).

³⁵ Gospodinov, *Natural Novel*, p. 21 (italics mine).

³⁶ Dobromir Grigorov, 'Tova e tekst za Estestven roman na Georgi Gospodinov' ('This is a Text about Georgi Gospodinov's Natural Novel'), *Slovoto Virtual Library* <<http://www.slovo.bg/showwork.php3?AuID=30&WorkID=489&Level=1>> [accessed 15 September 2013].

determine whether the narrators were once distinct and then commenced blurring into indistinguishability, or whether they began splitting up, differentiating from each other, having once been related to a point of indiscernibility. Thus, causal relations disintegrate and what is mobilized is a characterization of dispullulations, of fragmenting, perpetually unfinished multiplicities, reaching for an infinite exiting. In this sense, each of the narrators is paradoxically none and all of the others, in the process of a simultaneous ruination and creation of subjectivity. Hranova makes a related observation when she writes that, in *Natural Novel*, 'whether because it is unattainable or because it has been attained for a long time, totality is captured in the multiplicity of instances of its construction and disintegration, which also means in its manifolding into people, names, details, fossils, facets, books'.³⁷

This observation implies what may be called *Natural Novel's* injunction — a speaking in multiple voices that is itself a cataclysmic deployment of movements of division and fragmentation. The splitting voices, bodies and times in the present continuous makes possible differentiation, undecidability, newness, a radicalized future that does not close in on itself, having been grounded in a representable narrative of the past and, thus, having become a programme for the future. Indeed, the text performs and even explicitly discusses the inability to represent, as one of *Natural Novel's* narrators ponders an anonymous manuscript he has just received: 'Someone was trying to speak of his failed marriage and the novel (I don't know why I decided that it was a novel) revolved around the impossibility to narrate this failure. In fact... the novel itself was difficult to recount.'³⁸ While the manuscript in question may or may not be *Natural Novel* itself, the triple failure exposed already points not only to an awareness of the impasse of language that structures the text but also to an unfolding deferral of the movement of which the text partakes. Both suggest a deconstructive mobility, one that destabilizes and makes possible the interrogation of this instability.

As if determined to disturb all palpable patterns or perhaps to expose the impossibility of doing so completely, the text both perpetually effects and is continuously composed by paradoxical simultaneities that shatter its structure and inform its language. From the very first sentence fragment of the first chapter to the italicized five-line poem on the last page, it creates conflicts and works against a conventional unification, normalization and 'user-friendly' rationale that are inevitable aspects of

³⁷ Hranova, *Georgi Gospodinov*, p. 2.

³⁸ Gospodinov, *Natural Novel*, p. 13.

its own self-production. The first sentence of *Natural Novel* contains one verb 'razdeliam se', constituting the narrator's announcement that '[he and his wife] are splitting up'.³⁹ It is the beginning of an endless present continuous that permeates the novel thematically in that nothing — 'Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing [...]' nine consecutive times⁴⁰ — seems to happen, while everything is taking place. The reflexivity of the Bulgarian verb, *razdeliam se*, 'to split up', literally bearing the sense of 'to split oneself', is reflected by the structural dynamic. It is a fragmentation enacted by the entire text, in that other discontinuities (especially those embodied by the narrators) reflect, refract, but also oppose it. Significantly, as a reflexive verb, '[we] are *splitting ourselves*' is also equivocally of a double sense: one, with regard to a literal meaning that 'we are splitting *our selves*', in which selves are shattering into pieces and the first person plural is in the process of becoming inoperative or impossible; and, two, regarding the sense that the reflexive activity of the verb is directed against the self. Between this double gesture, the fragmentation — similar to a turning of the text against itself — itself fragments. Thus, a turn against the turn, a 'we' that in the Bulgarian is not explicitly given, haunts the fragmentation (or, as Durkheim might suggest, the social haunts the one necessarily in the present continuous). The 'we' of *Natural Novel*, however, is not a unified one, but a dispullulating many, precisely because 'we' enacts the fragmentation of anomie.

Between the first sentence fragment and the novel's last lines, this enactment both draws out the affirmative force that composes anomie and reveals the latter's necessity for reconstitutions, for breaking with self-sameness. The novel's last lines, 'I will vanish en masse / he said to them / I will vanish en masse / he said / like the dinosaurs',⁴¹ bespeak both the self's agency and absence thereof in terms of the disappearance, as well as the self's activity against itself. Left appositely unclear is whether the 'I' will evanesce into its fragmentation, cease to be, or mutate into another form, unrecognizable because no longer contingent on an immutable past, knowledge or recognition. In this sense, the last lines expose the foundation of undecidability, uncertainty, upon which disappearance and fragmentation rest. Unlike the extinction of dinosaurs, however, the vanishing of the 'I' is incomplete. The present continuous from the beginning has overtly passed not into the past, but into the future, a movement that continues the fragmentation first by indicating the

³⁹ Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 142.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 149.

continuous divisibility of the first person plural and, furthermore, by announcing the infinitely endeavoured towards but deferred disappearance of the first person singular, the hope of accomplishing it and its failure. Doubly emphasized both by the repetition and its adverbial position is 'en masse', conveying the sense of one body, a complete mass, but also the multiplicity in the totality of a vanishing 'I', its disappearance as one into many, or an 'I' that disappears itself as a mass, as a form of exodus, as an act of egress, as a resistance to the mass of matter of which it is made. From the beginning and through the beginning of each of its beginnings, the text deploys movements of anomie, composed of activities that, while isolating a self, turn against it in order to disband it.

Caught up in a similar movement of structural fragmentation, as well as discontinuity, are the forty-seven chapters of *Natural Novel*. While their numerical indication is on five occasions interrupted by titles, such as 'Editor's N.B.', or 'oo', or the symbol of the zodiac sign Aries, each new chapter itself breaks with the preceding through the voice of a different narrator (Kirova appositely points to a perpetual 'intertextual polilogue' unfolding on the pages of *Natural Novel*), or a new subject, and is, in turn, discontinued by the subsequent chapter. At the same time, the discontinuity engenders a continuous disorientation that melds narrators and subjects into indistinguishability. Perhaps in this particular movement of anomie — a mobility that bespeaks an urge to rupture the chain of signification — inheres a necessarily self-destructive impulse, tantamount even to a kind of suicide and marked by the failure of total completion and the hope of beginning again. Illustrative of the complexity of the act is the only chapter entitled with a symbol other than a number or words, the penultimate, brief, but teeming to explosion segment, '∩', the Egyptian hieroglyph of the ram:

during that year many run over dogs on the roads cats matted hair dried
 blood on the bushes tails in the ditches that guy moved in with emma
 with three tanks of fishlets fish procreate a lot easier die pigeons many I
 say around the barrels me what I don't eat them I sense that we are of the
 same breed happy holiday entering the store with dogs is forbidden we are
 seeking salesgirls clinton seems to be on his way out whose is this girl no
 no I don't want a home only a toilet flyyyyyy flyyyyyy is your decision final
 smile please brothers sokolovi get down from the cherry tree⁴²

⁴² Ibid., p. 148.

Akin to a Borgesian aleph, the chapter deftly captures *Natural Novel's* dispullulating jumble of visibilities and indistinguishabilities, of aporias and excesses. The chapter renders visible the blurring of matter, conventionally separated into internal and external, and the way in which the fusions of the two craft a narrative of the self, a self that must struggle to free itself from its self-sameness.

Defying chronology, the words construct a continuity of the discontinuous, as if to experiment with the boundaries and boundlessness of memory (brothers sokolovi), dream (the killing of pigeons in the narrator-writer's dream in the first chapter), the social (strays), the political (clinton), the economic (salesgirls), the cultural (stray dogs and cats), the personal (emma), the historical (symbolized by a Bulgarian cherry tree) — relations of forces flash-frozen in a singular confluence, movements of anomie, active in their operations as a self. The absence of punctuation itself also provides fluidity to the stream, in which even ellipses — indicating the omitted, the forgotten, the unspoken, the unknowable that dwells in the aporias between the words — are no longer necessary. At the same time, this fluidity in particular invokes a fragmentariness to everything uttered. Unimpeded by periods, commas and capitalizations, the text breaks in and rushes on without relying on a conventional beginning or an end, moving, rather, as if it had always sought motion, but had been kept from ceaselessly dispullulating. Like the blurry picture of a moving entity, however, the text can never fully capture its object but can still make a segment of movement visible. This is precisely one of the multiple possibilities that inhere in the symbol of Aries, the title of the chapter — an incessant spring indicating renewal — though the symbol also evokes the splintering of the self with which *Natural Novel* begins as well as an autofictional duality that mobilizes destruction and creation at once. As the outline of a pullulating seed, however, the symbol reverberates an analogy that the Naturalist makes, namely that, like seeds, words land in one's mind, take root and grow particular realities.⁴³ Ultimately, on a micro-scale, the chapter enacts the refractions that the novel performs on the macro-scale, endeavouring to subvert the linear narrative that closes the self into an unchanging and unchangeable hi/story. Interestingly, the fragmentation of a text as a postmodern method is directly discussed in *Natural Novel's* chapter, titled 'Towards the Natural History of the Flies'. The problematization not only takes a compelling turn to the compound eye of the fly but also attempts to work through a theory of textuality that, I argue, interrogates the relations among movement, change and the self.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 108.

The figure of the fly seems omnipresent in *Natural Novel*, with references to flies and even a conversation between the Naturalist and a fly called 'M' (the first letter of the Bulgarian word for fly, *muha*) interspersed throughout. The direct suggestion that refracting a text is a distinct method, modelled after the structure of the compound eye of the fly, however, emerges in one particular chapter. 'The fragmentation which some novelists use strategically', the speaker suggests, 'is in fact borrowed from the eye of the fly. What a novel would emerge if we were to succeed in making a fly tell a story!'⁴⁴ The speaker clarifies that it is not necessarily the content, to which a fly has been privy, that he finds compelling, but rather the kind of language of flight with which the fly itself moves in a world that it views 'like a mosaic, or facetly'.⁴⁵ Noting his interest in discovering 'the mechanism of the fly's language',⁴⁶ the speaker draws together sight and flight, examining the relations between the refracting movements of vision and the embodied movements of language. His conclusion — 'When we seek a new language, we must avoid inertia'⁴⁷ — points both to the necessity of discontinuity, a fragmentation that must work against a continuous force of immobilization, and to the correlation between novelty and movement, reconstitution and anomie.

To *write* a 'facet novel', however, necessarily bears a double-implication — of the haunting spectre of a fly and of the kaleidoscopic self — both of which the text opens to examination: 'each facet perceives only one point of the picture, but the whole image is put together in the brain. [...] It is commonly accepted that flies are near-sighted, but what more comprehensive, more detailed view of the world could we imagine.'⁴⁸ But a 'facet novel', a novel that encompasses 360 degrees of space and engages in the kinds of refractions that the eye of the fly naturally performs, is also an impossibility. 'We ourselves cannot imagine what it would be like to have a fixed eye with vision all round in the horizontal plane, as well as upwards and downwards', write G. A. Horridge and H. C. Longuet-Higgins, 'because we have a relatively narrow field of view, a very small area for object recognition in and around our fovea, and mobile eyes which fixate'.⁴⁹ Human eyes fail to see the central area of overlap between the frame of the left eye and the frame of the right, and the human brain

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴⁹ G. A. Horridge and H. C. Longuet-Higgins, 'What can Engineers Learn from Insect Vision?', *Philosophical Transactions The Royal Society B*, 337, 1992, pp. 271–82 (p. 276).

supplies whatever is omitted. In this sense, the compound eye appears as the opposite of the human: itself immobile, the former fragments the visible plane into a myriad of mobile details, a total spectrum of space from which the looking self seems to be missing, dispersed into the multi-faceted, kaleidoscopic mobility of infinite particle compositions. The human eye, instead, captures in its movement only fragments that it then puts together, locating the self in the space where vision ends. Both eyes necessarily rely on a supplementary unification, a putting-together that itself fastens a frame, immobilizes. This is a totality that haunts dispullulations and a totality that a 'facet novel' turns against. Only a facet novel can be a 'natural novel' then, a novel that subverts a single, totalized vision or text and in which the breaking open, the becoming imperceptible, the disappearance of the natural presence of a self is enacted. Still, all flies are not the same;⁵⁰ and neither are the facet novels they inhabit as spectres. In order to keep the fragmenting activity open to novelty and in motion infinitely, not only movements apart but also movements together, germinations and intensities are necessary.

On page seventeen, one of the three narrators posits a concept central to *Natural Novel*: 'The immodesty of my desire is in this, to make a novel out of beginnings only. A novel, that begins perpetually, promises something, reaches page 17 and starts over.'⁵¹ The narrator then proceeds to demonstrate, literally, how such a text would operate by combining the beginnings of various novels from different national origins and moments (among others, Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, Konstantinov's *Bai Ganyo*, Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Tolstoi's *Anna Karenina*, Vazov's *Under the Yoke*). Although his description and illustration of the idea invoke pastiche in the postmodern artistic sense, the 'natural novel' proposed does not merely bring together pre-existing elements in order to craft the snapshot of a collage in literary form. It rather exposes the infinite play of each fragment, germinating a multiplicity of others by virtue of the discontinuous interrelations among particles that themselves incite the emergence of infinite lines of flight.⁵²

⁵⁰ Gospodinov, *Natural Novel*, p. 91.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁵² The reference invokes Deleuze and Guattari's term deliberately here, since — as Hranova's short text also observes — textual dispullulations have much in common with rhizomaticity and lines of flight, not to mention that one of the Gospodinov narrators speaks of rhizomaticity directly when a child with whom he is conversing in chapter 13, 'slips out of the closed circle of the paradox', connecting lightnings and roots — phenomena and objects with no logical relations, p. 51.

Detached in this way, the beginnings acquire a life of their own and amalgamate via peculiar intertextual attractions and repulsions [...]. Read rapidly one after the other, they merge and become mobile similarly to the frames of a film reel as they pass into one shared kinetic that melds characters and events into some new story.⁵³

The system of exchange outlined seeks the invisible intensities of which texts are made in order to re-activate them and draw them out as far as it can into undecidability. Thus, it resists the impact of chronology, linear plot and the causal relations that each separate text is eventually made to fit, because a text is generally read and interpreted as a totality.

The very system of intertextuality, however, makes the impossibility of a beginning legible: once a beginning can be called a beginning it is no longer a beginning, because it has been immobilized, stripped of the capacity to begin perpetually anew. The implication of the narrator's 'immodest desire' (and one might invoke Durkheim here to say 'desire for the infinite') is that a natural novel necessarily deploys movements of a differing 'nature'. In the classical novel, a beginning is only treated as a beginning *to* something already determined. Interpreted as an event retrospectively and nominated by that which it begins, a beginning operates similarly to the way in which a visible effect makes possible the construction of an invisible cause. A 'natural novel', a novel of beginnings, is therefore one that redefines the function of a beginning by making it ontologically dependent not on that which succeeds it, but on its own infinite melding, blurring, interconnecting, opening to disappearance and novelty. In other words, a 'natural novel' beginning cannot be a beginning *to* anything; it can only move with an uncertainty, upon which dispullulations are premised. Another narrator attempts to clarify it thus:

nothing will be described in the Novel with the beginnings. It will only provide the initial impetus and will be sufficiently considerate to draw back in the shadow of the following beginning and to let characters connect in accordance with the situation. This I would call a Natural novel.⁵⁴

A 'natural novel', then could not describe, precisely because to describe is to immobilize, to arrest, rather than to stimulate movement. In this sense, when the narrator invokes Plato by noting that, "To write

⁵³ Ibid., p. 21.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 22.

Natural novel, you must stare ceaselessly into the visible. And discover simulacra',⁵⁵ he points out that the multiplicities, instabilities, creative and destructive dispullulations, the movements of anomie, occur perpetually within reflections and refractions. Thus, a 'natural novel' is incessantly haunted by and continuously breaks with totality (or with Totalitarianism, Communism). On its surface, attractions and repulsions compose the singular movements of beginnings run amok, lawlessly reconstituting multiplicitous selves.

From the memory fragments grouped together by decade, while at the same time dispullulating into other chapters, to the multiplicity of Georgi Gospodinov narrators, their struggles with language, *doxa* and the unstable relations between words and things, *Natural Novel* resists and subverts orthodox classifications, be they dialectical, moral, deductive, or causal. The text bears a resemblance to a Foucauldian heterotopia,⁵⁶ or what he describes in *The Order of Things* as an aphasiac's table top, upon which 'a multiplicity of tiny, fragmented regions in which nameless resemblances agglutinate things into unconnected islets' compose and then 'dissolve again, for the field of identity that sustains them, however limited it may be, is still too wide not to be unstable'.⁵⁷ But, even to liken the text to a heterotopia does not capture the activities of its anomie, the movements of which widen the 'field of identity'. Unlike heterotopias, *Natural Novel* opens for interrogation the categories and relations of and to time through an out-of-jointness that critiques the conventional and immobilizing dimensions of past, present and future. Through the interpenetrating hi/stories of narrators that conflate chronological sequentiality, by creating an impossibility to name one character without meaning the author and more characters at once and by challenging the operations of language and especially of the roles of nouns and verbs, *Natural Novel* draws a figure of change, composed of multiplicitous mobilities. As if to reveal the profound

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁵⁶ Foucauldian heterotopias are 'disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter and tangle common names, because they destroy "syntax" in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite to one another) to "hold together"... [heterotopias] desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences'. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, New York, 1994, p. xviii. Heterotopias bespeak the destructive impetus of anomie, inseparable as it is from the impetus that critiques and mobilizes the creation of new syntaxes, new ways of 'holding together' and breaking apart.

⁵⁷ Foucault, *The Order*, p. xviii.

difference that these mobilities introduce, the narrator translates ‘the Bible of the flies’: ‘1:1 In beginning /was/ air. And /God/ said: Let there be movement. And /there was/ movement.’⁵⁸ Air replaces the word; movement substitutes light — the very premises of language are altered, because a language that speaks things themselves ‘requires spaces, emptiness, where it can realize itself.’⁵⁹ This language is God, the narrator-writer explains, while retelling a story he once wrote about a man who could speak it and who could never fall asleep, terrified that he would unwittingly utter in his sleep words like ‘fire, ash and ice, apocalypse’, for ‘the entire history of the world depends on what he would speak.’⁶⁰ In some ways, *Natural Novel* is this insomniac, uttering words with the utmost vigilance, with a sense of responsibility for the space that each of them will create and how it will participate in future dispullulations. Simultaneously, it is also the somnambulist, the narrator-writer, who was ‘dead for a few hours’,⁶¹ speaking unconsciously or rather being spoken by habitual machinery. The language of ‘natural novel’ emerges in the tensions between the two.

In an interview with Natalia Nikolaeva, Gospodinov responds to the question ‘What happens with the spoken words?’ by noting that,

According to *Natural Novel*’s mad gardener [the Naturalist], the chaotic production/inception of words and names has brought matters to the edge of Apocalypse. The spoken words take root in the minds of others like seeds. And he suggests that for the duration of a year words should only be thought. Not spoken, not written. In order to recover the balance between words and things.⁶²

Like the language that does not speak words but things, language in general appears to do the same; through words, dispullulating as names, it constructs realities and carries an infection that cannot be neutralized,⁶³ as the Naturalist contends, refusing to say (and thus activate) what terrible occurrence will materialize when the separation between words and things is complete. He muses that ‘Very soon strange things will begin to happen

⁵⁸ Gospodinov, *Natural Novel*, p. 136.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁶² Natalia Nikolaeva, ‘Georgi Gospodinov: Talantăt e kraina chuvstvitelnost kăm vsichko, koeto boli, naraniava, ili radva...’ (‘Georgi Gospodinov: Talent is an extreme sensitivity towards everything that aches, harms or brings joy...’), *Public Republic*, 17 September 2008 <<http://www.public-republic.com/magazine/2008/09/2697.php>> [accessed 22 April 2012].

⁶³ Gospodinov, *Natural Novel*, p. 108.

with us all. And perhaps they already are [happening]. Things that will not be luminous like the apocalypse, which is why they will not be paid attention to'.⁶⁴ He points out that war and the apocalypse are only meant to detract attention from what is to come, an indescribable horror that is much more difficult to discern. In the shadow of this untimely, inarticulable immanence, I suggest, apocalypse doubles (or, more precisely, multiplies),⁶⁵ emerging once as an impossibility of breaking out of predetermination and again as a Nietzschean 'terrible explosive, endangering everything',⁶⁶ but subtle and multiplicitous. In this sense, too, while the Naturalist finds his 'private apocalypse'⁶⁷ in discovering that his life coincides to the word with a bad novel that has already been written, the narrator-writer is terrified to think 'that the end is impossible. There is more apocalypse in this, than in the fairy-tales about the apocalypse. There is no end'.⁶⁸ To be terrified, to inhabit impossibility is the invocation of apocalypse, precisely because, to *Natural Novel*, apocalypse is simultaneously the disappearance, erasure, death of the self-same and the terror that accompanies it — a fear of the different, the untimely and the unstable. Each of these participates in the dispullulations, in the movements of anomie that transform 'natural novel' into a critical ontology.

Along a similar line, Maria Kalinova asserts that 'language is a way of living in this text',⁶⁹ which can be interpreted as a commentary on a

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁶⁵ Georgi Gospodinov's interest in 'apocalypses' is not limited to *Natural Novel*. His play, staged in January 2010, is titled 'The Apocalypse Arrives at 6 pm'. The play makes evident more so than any other text, according to Kamelia Nikolova, Gospodinov's desire to use words as an 'optical instrument, a means of seeing, a supplementary eye that is most excited by what it sees and plays with the perspective.' Asen Terziev, 'Apokalipsisät idva v 6 vecherta' ('The Apocalypse Arrives at 6 pm'), *Literaturen Vestnik*, 1319 January 2010, p. 8. In a short description of the play, Gospodinov writes that 'the apocalypse is not necessarily fire-and-brimstone, a global crash, equestrians, trumpeting angels. It is rather minimalistic and mute. Sometimes the end of the world is something very private and quotidian. It comes at that hour of the early autumn dusk, in that minute, when the light is already gone and the darkness has not yet arrived. The stories here happen in this long minute. The minute prior... The play examines precisely this point break of coexistence, beyond which the fragile truces with others are breached'. Georgi Gospodinov, 'Iz "Apokalipsisät idva v 6 vecherta"' ('From "The Apocalypse arrives at 6 pm."'), *Public Republic*, 1 March 2011 <<http://www.public-republic.com/magazine/2011/03/68847.php>> [accessed 18 February 2012].

⁶⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, New York, 1989, p. 281.

⁶⁷ Gospodinov, *Natural Novel*, p. 111.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁶⁹ Maria Kalinova, 'Estestven roman — sedem godini i osem ezika po-käsno' ('Natural Novel — Seven Years and Eight Languages Later'), Tsentär za kultura i debati 'Chervenata käshta' (Centre for culture and debates 'The Red House'), *Liternet.bg* (Sofia), 13 April 2006

strictly textual quality. It seems to me, however, that the comment also points to ‘living in “natural novel”’ as itself a mode or a mobility of living that is not without dangers — according to Hranova, the text is terrified of the autonomy of language and the loosening of words.⁷⁰ And yet, like the *roi* in *razroiavane* — that is, like a segment of a swarm that departs to seek a new dwelling⁷¹ — the text seeks to live differently, to inhabit its abode, the novel, otherwise. Both Kalinova’s and Hranova’s observations speak to the relation of the text to itself as an embodiment of the anomie in language, as an event of language, both ‘natural’ and apocalyptic — terrifying, because of an known ‘to come’, dangerous, because of its drawing further into uncertainty and instability and, therefore, all the more *novel*. But they also speak to living in the nineties, to living in anomie not as a malaise, but as an occasion for creative *becomings*, for disappearing ‘en masse’, which is to say, for opening up *novel* experiences and understanding of the events that we encounter, as Deleuze defines it — a political and ethical occasion of becoming ‘worthy of what happens to us’.⁷² In this sense, *Natural Novel*’s critical ontology bears implications beyond the text, to the individual, to Bulgarian culture, as well as to a current global time inflected by uncertainty. Perhaps it is readers’ recognition of the last that resulted in the text’s broad and powerful resonance across the globe.

<<http://liternet.bg/publish2/anonim/ggospodinov.htm>> [accessed 26 September 2013].

⁷⁰ Albena Hranova, ‘Estestven roman — sedem godini i osem ezika po-käsno’ (‘Natural Novel — Seven Years and Eight Languages Later’), Tsentär za kultura i debati ‘Chervenata käshta’ (Centre for culture and debates ‘The Red House’), *Liternet.bg* (Sofia), 13 April 2006 <<http://liternet.bg/publish2/anonim/ggospodinov.htm>> [accessed 26 September 2013].

⁷¹ *Roi*, Tälkoven rechnik, *OnlineRechnik.com* <<http://talkoven.onlinerechnik.com/duma/%D1%80%Do%BE%Do%B9>> [accessed 2 January 2015].

⁷² Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, New York, 1990, p. 149.