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*Ludwig Wittgenstein also sought to escape from the reductive explanation of language as representative of reality. And it was precisely through the form of a list that he engineered his escape. His famous Philosophical Investigations is written in the form of a gigantic list- an unending list of possible uses of language. Wittgenstein says that there is no one law of language, but rather, that language defines its own rules on an instance by instance basis according to each unique situation or iteration. Wittgenstein uses the paradigm of the game to articulate these borderless rules of language. Wittgenstein writes:*

*“... this diversity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and...The word “language-game” is used here to emphasize the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity; or of a form of life. Consider the variety of language-games in the following examples, and in others:*

*Giving orders, and acting on them —*

*Describing an object by its appearance, or by its measurements —*

*Constructing an object from a description (a drawing) —*

*Reporting an event —*

*Speculating about the event —*

*Forming and testing a hypothesis —*

*Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams —*

*Making up a story; and reading one —*

*Acting in a play —*

*Singing rounds —*

*Guessing riddles —*

*Cracking a joke; telling one —*

*Solving a problem in applied arithmetic —*

*Translating from one language into another —*

*Requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying. — ”*

*— Wittgenstein. PI. §23.*

*What is interesting here is how Wittgenstein’s writing formally emphasizes the point that he is*

making. Wittgenstein writes in list form, rattling off example after example in a way that seems like he could go on forever. Indeed, even within the points there are several types of examples, making it seem like each individual point on the list could turn into a much longer list: “cracking a joke; telling one —”. Wittgenstein here reminds one that a joke is not just one type of language game. Jokes arise in a practically infinite number of situations, and in the future, there will be new situations where one will joke in yet another unexpected way. It’s almost as if Wittgenstein is implying that each “iteration” of joking could be a new game. At the end of his list Wittgenstein speeds up: “Requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying. —” As if to emphasize that his ending is not really an ending at all, but merely an ellipsis indicating that he could go on forever but hasn’t the time at this particular moment. But when one thinks about this, one realizes that the entire book is a kind of list. Wittgenstein’s seemingly endless numbered paragraphs show that there is no limit to the number of forms of language. Indeed, even if one had managed to count them, “new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence”. Wittgenstein “ends” his text, just like the list above. With “just-another-point-on-the-list” — Wittgenstein offers no summary of his arguments, and no conclusion. For these would reduce his thoughts to an idea and destroy the infinite nature of his games which sprawl across his book and even further — into our lives and futures.

The list is everywhere in my master work, both in the collaboration with manuel abreu, and in the opera. Lists, in fact, while intimately connected to prayer, also are formally connected to the games and play, and with them, humor. In fact, in opera history (and also in other genres) the list is often employed in comic situations. The most famous list in opera is perhaps Leporello’s aria “Il catalogo è questo,” but a more modern example from György Ligeti’s *Le Grand Macabre* also comes to mind: “Arse-licker, arse-kisser”. In this duet, two characters insult each other in alphabetical order, comically skipping over “I” and “J” when they cannot think of insults beginning with those letters. This example, as well as emphasizing the comic place of the list within opera, also brings us back to the alphabetical list as a stand in for an infinite list comprising the entirety of language from start to finish. Within Ligeti’s opera, this is just one of many eerily hyper-formal gestures, always bordering on extra-musical, or rather the “extra-human”. The opera is famous for its two preludes: one played by car-horns, and the other by door-bells — ringing at the border between life and death, between music and noise, between meaning and absurdity.