

INTRODUCTION

Nicola Masciandaro

The “task of the commentator” is neither to describe the world, nor to change it, but to confound the illusions by which its contingencies assume the air of inevitability.

—Erik Butler

The perfect place to write a great work of literature would be a **symbiosis of home and prison.**

—Alan Clinton

[T]here is no real paradox in deciding against the decision, provided that the one who decides is not sovereign, but *anyone* who chooses freedom and dignity over domination.

—Bruno Gulli

Surviving manuscript copies suggest that the marginal Latin commentary was an integral part of the translation in its circulation, and probably in its composition.

—Stephanie A. Viereck Gibbs Kamath

You know this. It does not require commentary.

—Anna Kłosowska & Nicola Masciandaro

To recognise is to confirm by second looks, and to experience why such recognition may move the soul is to feel each just pleasure in confirming a hunger for acknowledgment which, until thus confirmed, might have never been admitted or even registered.

—J. H. Prynne

The comment must not worry too much about getting its final codes right if it is going to participate in the poem, if it is going to always already be the radiance that is the romance of the poem—the sprouting antler sprouting more in the shape of an infinity of codes.

—Dan Remein

Perhaps what is at stake is less a methodologically regulated path to a predetermined end than an “ethical” reorientation, a concomitant change in the character of the inquirer and the inquiry.

—Adam Rosen

. . . a double channel work of sound and image, which then allows one *to hear* that commentary spoken as, indeed, a form of *dictation*—and *commentaire*

—Michael Stone-Richards

Take these epigraphs as a small garland, a chain of flowers collected from *Glossator*’s first volume, presented here both in gratitude to their authors and for the reader, as a poetic suggestion of the work their contributions are doing, individually and collectively. Read them closely and you will find that they comment on each other, even conduct a subtle conversation (found or made?), a dialogue composed—like all commentary—of a mysterious intersection between a reading subject and a textual object. This dialogue concerns especially the ambivalent *creativity* of commentary, its operation as a complex formal space defined by decidedly mixed characteristics and impulses: exposure, critique, renewal, freedom, possession, constraint, superfluity, belatedness, excess, irrelevance, openness . . .

According to Giorgio Agamben’s diagnosis, it is precisely the “loss of commentary and the gloss as creative forms” that attests to the impossibility of “any healing” in Western culture “between *Halacha* and *Aggada*, between *shari’at* and *haqīqat*, between subject matter and truth content.”¹ To this schism we may add, as a rough parallel, that between *practice* and *theory*, the proportionally inseparable variables included in this journal’s title with deliberate emphasis on the priority of the former as what holds the key to both (practice founds theory). In light of this priority—we want *commentary*, really, send us **COMMENTARIES!**—the primary editorial challenges of this volume lay in negotiating the minority of submissions employing the apparatus of formal, running commentary and the unexpected number of hybrid submissions: commentarial work addressing commentary. A volume neatly divided into writings *about* commentary and *actual* commentaries turned out to be impossible. But this impossibility now appears as a more propitious start than the editors could have planned, the index of a less predictable and more authentic desire for commentary, a creative beginning.

¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (Verso: New York, 1993), 160.