

INSPIRATION

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INSPIRATION

We speak of 'inspiration,' and the word should be taken literally. There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, action and passion so slightly discernible that it becomes impossible to distinguish between what sees and what is seen, what paints and what is painted. (Merleau-Ponty, 1974: 288)

Artistic activity makes the artist aware that he is not the author of his works. The efficient causality which, in day-to-day activity, binds the worker quite unambiguously to what he produces ... turns out, in the artist ... to be under the influence of voices that are mysterious insofar as they cannot be compared to those resorted to in usual forms of collaboration; to be consumed by summonses which even deflect its propulsion from true.

This ... this age-old experience of inspiration ... takes on exceptional weight when one asks oneself whether enthusiasm or possession are not concealed at the heart of all activity, even beneath the primordial activity of consciousness and language; whether a delirium more profound than thought does not support thought; whether language which claims to be act and origin ... is not an inveterate passivity, the endless reiteration of an old old story (Levinas, 1989: 151)

Roland Barthes' 'The Death of the Author' ends with the famous demand that 'the birth of the reader must be requited by the death of the Author' (1986: 55). Curiously, many students first read these words not as a birth of their freedom but a bitter death of their hopes. Having come to

university and sociology to find their unique voice, to express themselves as Authors, they resent Barthes' suggestion that their texts are 'a vast stereophony', 'woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages' (1977: 160). Approached from this distance of resentment, Barthes' account seems a nonsensical denial of their experiences as writers: 'Who wrote the essay if not me? ... And I'm not dead!'

The authorial model is still sociological orthodoxy, for instead of **writing**, most sociologists **write up** or **write out** or **write down**, aiming to express a truth that exists independent of its expression. While empiricists write down what they've witnessed in the reality outside the text, without conspicuously leaving a first person trace, confessional authors write out what they've personally been thinking, feeling or doing, establishing verisimilitude through tokens of authenticity and the rhetorical effect of the 'I'. The former approach denies and the latter foregrounds narratorial voice, but they rest on the same assumptions about the text and the expressive author: in both cases, 'expression fades out before what is expressed' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 401; see Otte, 1995; Jackson, 1989: 1ff). Both assume readers who desire comprehension, the grasping of the message expressed by the author (see Game and Metcalfe, 1996).

Expressive sociology, then, is written in invisible ink. Despite insisting on the productivity of **other** technologies and mediations, most sociologists dismiss concern with their own writing as 'self-indulgent', 'airy-fairy' or 'wanky' diversions from the 'real' issues. These terms suggest that sociology's 'real world', outside the text, is a sexually charged and sacred space produced through repression and taboo.

Rather than challenging the expressive model through a cool analysis of textual echo and polyvalence, I will directly

confront the indignant claim that we all **know** the author exists. Believing that it is the expressive model that contradicts intuition, I will evoke familiar writerly experiences of the death of the knowing subject and expressive author. The expressive model is only persuasive if, to maintain sociological propriety, we're willing to repress what our writing bodies know of such things as inspiration, communion, annunciation, genius, prophecy, angels, ghosts, possession, intuition, passion, rapture and ecstasy. Although these are taboo themes, unacknowledged in sociology's self-descriptions, I contend that all writers experience such transformative summonses daily, and that they underlie ordinary creativity and sociality. (These claims are themselves inspired, by Durkheim's arguments about communion and effervescence.) Moreover, because all these experiences entangle passivity and alterity - passion, for example, involving 'the fact or condition of being acted upon or affected by external agency' (Oxford English Dictionary) - all demonstrate the overthrow of the expressive authorial 'I' and the difficulty in distinguishing the 'inspiration and expiration of Being':

Speaking to others (or to myself), I do not speak **of** my thoughts; I **speak them**.... Not [as] a mind to a mind, but [as] a being who has body and language to a being who has body and language, each drawing the other by invisible threads like those who hold the marionettes - **making** the other speak, **think**, and become what he is but never would have been by himself.

Thus things **are said** and **are thought** by a Speech and by a Thought which we do not have but which has us. (Merleau-Ponty, 1974: 19; see Barthes, 1975)

More broadly, I want to challenge the continued reliance on the figure of the knowing subject. When sociologists insist on locating glimmers of the 'agency', 'resistance' or 'voice'

of the oppressed, or when they assume that it's always objectionable to be passive or 'objectified', they evince the confused orthodoxy that people are or should be expressive authors of their lives. By insisting instead on the importance of spaces **in-between** subject and object, and on the ecstatic and creative possibilities of passivity, I offer a more complex model of the self that raises different questions for sociology.

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Although a friendly colleague described my arguments as 'religious mysticism' (see James, 1994: scr 610), I claim no privileged mystical access to an ultimate reality. With many orthodox sociologists, however, I assume that mystical phenomena are ubiquitous, or more accurately that society and creativity are unthinkable without religion; and I assume therefore that these processes are part of sociology, as well as being its object. More specifically, the cultural production of sociology relies on the performance of communion, transubstantiation and the like. Nisbet alludes to the key issue when he notes that Durkheim's **Elementary Forms of the Religious Life** is a 'powerful justification... of the functional indispensability of religion to society', written by 'a professed, **virtually devout, agnostic**' (1976: v, my emphasis). This nervous phrase probes sociology's heart.

In **Elementary Forms**, Durkheim insists that he can replace the mythological babel with scientific universality, identifying society as the **sui generis** basis of everything religious:

even if the impressions which the faithful feel are not imaginary ... there is no reason for believing that they inform us ... upon the nature of their object.... In order to discover what this object consists of, we must

submit [the intuitions of the faithful] to an examination and elaboration analogous to that which has substituted for the sensuous idea of the world another which is scientific and conceptual.

... we have seen that this reality, which mythologies have represented under so many different forms, but which is the universal and eternal objective cause of these sensations **sui generis** out of which religious experience is made, is society. (1976: 418)

Durkheim's understanding stands, however, on undermined ground.

First, **if** religion is functionally required for social life, society cannot come first. Where Durkheim claims that people who speak of God speak of sociality, we might equally claim that people who speak of society speak of religion, and that in the very act of speaking (i.e. interacting socially), they are performing devotional acts. Society is not **sui generis** and cannot be known in itself. This argument has powerful implications for sociologists, as those who speak most about society.

Second, by leaving sociology outside the domain of society, Durkheim protects science from profanation by scientific scrutiny, but only by giving it sacred status as eternal Truth (Douglas, 1975: ix-xxi; Taussig, 1992: 119ff; Game and Metcalfe, 1996: 164ff). Positivist sociological science is Durkheim's own religion, its sacred objective concepts produced through a separation of the intuitions and sensations of profane experience. This abstraction is a methodism, a religious discipline for producing devoutly agnostic visions of the universal and eternal.

These arguments change my understanding of Durkheim's ability to inspire me with a palpable, goose-bumpy, sense of the rapture of social life. **If** the social is religious (an

issue that can't be settled), then **Elementary Forms** operates on religion's plane, not only talking **about** society and religion, but **performing** the social and religious. It does social-and-religious things with words (see Austin, 1961; Sedgwick, 1990; Parker and Sedgwick, 1995). As a reader, I am swept away by Durkheim's account of how ritual sweeps people away, and by making me participate in this enactment of the social and religious, **Elementary Forms** persuades me in a full-bodied way. The text isn't sociologically effective because it provides abstract access to objective reality, but because it makes ideas vivid and sensuous, makes the world actual to me through me (see Game and Metcalfe, 1996: 43ff; Ricoeur, 1986: 43).

I recognise what I want to say in Steiner's claim for art, perhaps because sociology is a form of art:

the poem, the statue, the sonata are not so much read, viewed or heard as they are **lived**. The encounter with the aesthetic is, together with certain modes of religious and metaphysical experience, the most 'ingressive', transformative summons available to human experiencing. Again, the shorthand image is that of an Annunciation, of 'a terrible beauty' or gravity breaking into the small house of our cautionary being. If we have heard rightly the wing-beat and provocation of that visit, the house is no longer habitable in quite the same way as it was before. A mastering intrusion has shifted the light (that is very precisely, non-mystically, the shift made visible in Fra Angelico's **Annunciation**). (1991: 143)

The deconstructive strategy here applied to Durkheim can be applied elsewhere, as Taussig (1992) shows in his re-analysis of Turner's 'A Ndembu Doctor in Practice' (1970). Through a story about rites to heal illnesses caused by the teeth of ghostly ancestors, Turner approaches the 'bigger'

issue of torn social fabric. But because the article denies its own story-telling, it generates a third narrative level. While listening to a story about the magical effects on Ndembu people of an Aristotelian narrative catharsis, Turner's readers are led on their own narrative journey, venturing through the 'wilds' of Africa, unsure of whether anthropological knowledge will be vindicated. Anthropology's theoretical order is a third patient, healed through Turner's work on its Ndembu surrogates.

Sociologists and shamans both create other worlds in narrative form, making one world plausible by relating it to another, slipping between registers, slipping from parts (teeth, the Ndembu) to wholes (ancestors, human society) and back again. Where the shaman has the ancestor's tooth, the sociologist has names, examples, photographs, maps, tables, quotations, all of which use the magical processes of similarity and contagion to acquire the power of what they're meant to represent. The Ndembu exist for Turner's readers in the same way as the ancestor's spirit exists for the healer's audience. Ndembu magic **is** magic, but it is the performative magic mediated through Turner's text. If the **present** text is effective, it is also through magic.

Levi-Strauss appreciated this. Unlike Durkheim's, Levi-Strauss' studies of myth are themselves mythological, he averred, showing 'not how men think in myths, but how myths operate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact' (1986: 12); he couldn't say if the thought processes of South American Indians find expression through his intellectual work or whether his thought processes find expression through theirs (1986: 12-13); wisdom isn't the capacity to reach prime causes but the ability to think relationally: to live myth while knowing, in a different register, that what you're living is myth (1966: 255). Such precepts inspire what Ann Game and I have called a **Passionate Sociology** (1996). They suggest richer, more honest and full-bodied knowledges that

acknowledge the writer's own sociality.

This double-vision is the key to rigorous sociology. It isn't an escape from mysticism, but it suspends mysticism's claims; it is an attempt to ensure that all cultural productions remain under tension, without recourse to an absolute mystical privilege, like that claimed by those who deny all involvement with mysticism. The real mystics are those who refuse to acknowledge the ghosts and spirits and intuitions called up by the rituals that produce sociology, who presume the possibility of **presence**, who want sociology's practices and writing left to operate as invisible (angelic) messengers conveying Truth.

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According to the conventional model, sociologists express thought in writing, as if thought is put into writing as a letter is put in an envelope. My claim is that 'thought' only derives a 'content' from its relation to such particular mediating forms as language, writing, genre, cultural history, institutional discipline and the human body. The present text's meaning is as saturated in its writing as its ink is in its paper. Writers don't deliver messages, then, they make gestures (Merleau-Ponty, 1974: 60).

The expressive account of the moment before annunciation contrasts with Serres' commentary on Fra Angelico's painting. Serres' emphasis is on wonder and alterity in the relation between speaker and speech:

At the moment of the Annunciation, Fra Angelico gives his angel wings that are banded in rainbow colours.... A man can only guess at the reality of a woman's conception, via the imperfect analog of what happens with language: when an author thinks that he has something to say,

before speaking or writing, his body, as if filled with love, becomes uplifted and vibrates like a rainbow. He doesn't yet know where his idea will settle, or in which direction it will go, or in what shades it will be coloured. The bodily state which precedes the emergence of an idea in spoken form begins in an aurora borealis, a kind of totality shaped liked an opened-out fan, accompanied by such an emotion that the body experiences the word 'emotion' itself as that movement of soaring flight, enraptured and suspended, to which it refers. Hence these wings which beat like those of a bird fluttering over a fixed point without yet having decided on a direction, and which are shaded in every possible colour, of which, at the end, only one will remain. That is what intuition sees before the thing actually comes into sight. (1995: 109; original ellipsis)

Launching into speech, however, doesn't make the fluttering fullness settle in an expressible idea. Speakers still can't say what they want to say. One reason is that they must feel their way with language, each word changing the possibilities of the next (see Dillard, 1989: 7). But this, in turn, raises the question of how people choose their words.

Crites addresses this broad issue by distinguishing sacred and mundane stories. The former, he says, live

in the arms and legs and bellies of the celebrants. These stories lie too deep in the consciousness of a people to be directly told: they form consciousness rather than being among the objects of which it is directly aware (1989: 69).

People **awaken to** always pre-existing sacred stories, and mundane stories, which can be directly seen, heard and devised, are attempts to articulate these awakenings:

all a people's mundane stories are implicit in its sacred story.... People are able to feel this resonance, because the unutterable stories are those they know best of all. (1989: 71)

Mundane stories are only effective because they remind audiences of the sacred stories that cannot be uttered directly, but mundane stories are never fully successful. (I'd nevertheless insist on epiphanic moments when, as writers and readers, we feel the gap closed.)

Inspired by Merleau-Ponty, Castoriadis also identifies an annunciatory gap, between 'the sayable and the unsayable'. The desire to speak comes from

a void which swells in the already said; a void which is determined in the sense that the one who is about to speak knows that there is something other and more to be said than what has already been said, but nothing positive beyond that fact, beyond the fact that it is not said by what has already been said. (1984: 132)

Signs 'lean' on horizons of imaginary significance which can only be discussed in signs, but which can never be exhausted or expressed through signs: 'imaginary social significations ... **denote** nothing at all, and they **connote** just about everything' (1987: 143). Speaking and writing, then, involve asymmetrical and indirect interactions between the signs and imaginaries. Unable to say the unsayable, the writer 'gropes around a significative intention which is not guided by any text' (Merleau-Ponty, 1974: 43): I make an utterance without knowing exactly what I'm saying, then respond to it as my own audience, test it against the knowledge of my arms and legs and especially belly, feel a void here or a discordance there, take another stab at the utterance, respond to this amendment - and so it goes, until time elapses or my body rests (cf

Mead, 1934). Often I cannot find a word to fill the void, and my intention is lost, until apparently recalled by reading someone else's writing. Even when a word fits perfectly, it isn't because it repeats a pre-existing form. In Callois' haunting phrase, it 'is similar, not similar to something, just **similar**' (cited in Taussig, 1993: 34).

The expressive account of annunciation is confounded by mundane conceptual stories like these. Writers, poignantly, are their own most ardent readers. As if emerging from possession by drugs or spirits, they read to know what they wrote under the influence. Instead of expressing what's already present inside, writers respond to their 'own' alterity.

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I share Serres' assumption that annunciation paintings depict the pregnant moment **before** speech. Undetermined, this instant of anticipation holds more than whatever will, in time, emerge. Its fullness lends an aura to the subsequent speech, and this speech always retains precious possibilities for surprise, but, nevertheless, as the announcement takes shape, its fullness leaks, drop by drop, word by word, with the closure of possibilities.

I start writing when this trembling fullness won't be contained, but the excitement is shadowed by fear. Writing takes a long time: will my body remember its present condition well enough to know when the writing becomes thin or hollow? I fear the disenchantment and shame of waking to find that my 'transparent little dream is really just another book' (Sendak, 1977: 253). (Of course, in one sense it **is** 'just another book', and writing may require a delusion about the significance of one's significative intention.)

My writing relies, therefore, on techniques for preparing my body for writing: I try to hold the whole paper buzzing in my gut. It relies, too, on technologies for forestalling entropy and revitalising the inspiration of the weeks and moments before writing. This is what lists are, and until a first draft is done, I make frenzied lists of every point and association that occurs to me. I use lists to record 'flashes' one by one, to spark new ideas by playing with connections between points, to sound and relive the poetry of my concerns.

'Every point and association that **occurs to me.**' Upon rereading the last paragraph, this casual phrase shocks me with its strange accuracy. And then I scare myself: how could I have forgotten, in the past few writing days, my vital sense that inspiration involves passivity, even if it arrives amidst creative frenzy. Inspiration is received, not attained. Far removed from stoicism's drab resignation, though, this is the active and rapturous passivity that James associates with Christian saints (1994: scr 65).

In one form, my active passivity resembles the receptive emptiness practised by mystics (see James, 1994: scr 174). When I'm in the shower, for example, safe, enclosed, relaxed, my mind surrendered to the water flowing over me, ideas often occur to me like revelations - clear, whole and unbidden. I cannot force these flashes, yet they occur because I've opened myself to them and because I've been actively pursuing my concerns before the shower.

In another form, passivity **approaches** the world, through wonder, 'an action that is both active and passive' (Irigaray, 1993: 73). Wonder wants to know but not assimilate:

This other, male or female, should **surprise** us again and again, appear to us as **new, very different** from what we knew or what we thought he or she should be. Which means that we would look at the other, stop to look at him or

her, ask ourselves, come close to ourselves through questioning. **Who art thou? I am** and **I become** thanks to this question. (Irigaray, 1993: 74)

The intensity of my wonder changes the other's meaning. Shedding its faceless objectivity, the world turns and moves toward me, as enchanted as the talking woods and animals in children's stories. Wherever I look - casual phrases, books, TV shows, movies, songs, conversations - it is alive to my concerns: everyday events that normally pass unnoticed, half-lived, become auspicious; apparently separate phenomena reveal their profound connections. The world **speaks to me** and I joyfully register its announcements in page after page of my notepads. I feel the wing beats of miracle, serendipity, fate. And in these passionate suspenseful moments, a **relation** forms between me and the world, including, of course, 'my' text. We face each other.

This experience resounds in Durkheim's account of ritual effervescence:

if collective life awakens religious thought on reaching a certain degree of intensity, it is because it brings about a state of effervescence which changes the conditions of psychic activity. Vital energies are over-excited, passions more active, sensations stronger; there are even some which are produced only at this moment. **A man does not recognise himself; he feels transformed and consequently he transforms the environment which surrounds him.** In order to account for the very particular impressions which he receives, he attributes to the things with which he is in most direct contact properties which they have not, exceptional powers and virtues which the objects of every-day experience do not possess. (1976: 422, my emphasis; cf Nietzsche, 1954: 518)

Wonder relies on an unassimilated self. Consider its characteristic double take. We see something, then we stop and **see** something. Cartoonists depict the second take as an elastic movement of head and eyes **toward** the newly seen object, which has suddenly come alive for us; yet we also say we're 'taken aback' by the shock of the new, that it 'sets us back on our heels'. The double take actually involves three moments - it draws me extraordinarily close to the other by estranging me from, by reminding me of, my ordinary senses of identity and the world. It suspends me between two places, between my first and second take:

Is wonder the time that is always covered over by the **present**? The bridge, the stasis, the moment of **in-stance**? Where I am no longer in the past and not yet in the future. The point of passage between two closed worlds (Irigaray, 1993: 75)

As Durkheim suggests, even the rapturous moments in wonder have this suspended tremulous quality. Rapture, passion and ecstasy involve being transported, or swept or carried away. When ecstatic, I am beside myself; when effervescent, I do not recognise myself. But this is another complex movement, for to be beside myself I must be in two places; to not recognise myself I must recognise the lost sense of self-recognition. Thus Clement (1994) characterises rapture as a little death of the self, an ego orgasm, a cerebral eclipse. It is a **moment** whose quality comes from its awareness of its momentary and therefore timeless nature. The rapturous relies on the shadow of the ordinary, just as, Durkheim insists, the 'ideal' is part of the real and everyday (1976: 422).

The doubled and suspended qualities of wonder explain why it calls out metaphors of vibration. Shuddering, fluttering, shivering, shimmering: such terms insist on movement **and**

stasis. They also highlight wonder's suspenseful fragility. It is a way of knowing that evades the arrested qualities required for apprehension; it cannot be conveyed to another or stored for oneself; it is defenceless in the face of blase trivialisation; its particular momentary qualities are readily dissolved ('covered over') by such familiar cultural forms as the story or analysis. Yet it is a vital source of inspiration for writers. Despite denying his own ecstasy, Durkheim surely wrote his wonderful account of effervescence under dictation from the shimmering world he encountered while writing.

So, in the moment before delivery, the world **outside** the would-be annunciator pulsates with the fluttering fullness that Serres identifies **inside** the angel. As would-be annunciator, I am summoned by the world to witness and receive its annunciations. My nostrils are filled with the breath of life that is the divine medium in which I live. The word inspiration hovers between breathing **into** the other (inspiring them) and breathing **in** the other (inspiring). Inside and outside, activity and passivity, inspiration and expiration: inspiration overflows such categorical boundaries. As would-be annunciator, I become a **tangle** of angel and flesh, or ink and flesh; I cannot say if I possess or am possessed by the thought which buzzes and grows inside me, demanding birth; I cannot say if I approached the world or it approached me; I become inside **and** outside, sender **and** receiver, Gabriel **and** Mary.

Fra Angelico's Gabriel and Mary are separate, not touching, their hands holding themselves in. Mary's conception and pregnancy is as far from Gabriel's direct understanding as Gabriel's angelic purpose is from Mary's; neither can conceive (of) the other's conception, but each represents to the other their own mysterious condition. Mary's child and Gabriel's words: both are alloyed mysteries to those about to issue them, and both will remain wonders of alterity once produced. So Mary and Gabriel are separate, but they respectfully

gesture toward each other. The possibility of a bond between them, what they recognise in each other, is the divine (see Serres, 1995: 111). The speaker who produces words and the mother who produces a child: these are irreparably different processes, but deeply intertwined through metaphor and the social imaginary. In this moment of annunciation, where the conventional is-ness of things is called into question by their relationality and always emergent quality, Mary cannot settle on the form of salutary words to offer her visitor.

As Levinas says, in the passage I've taken for my epigraph, orthodox causality is disrupted in this creative process: on his Master's instructions, Gabriel announces the imminent birth of the Lord, his Master; Mary receives a message from the Lord who will be her issue. Cixous, likewise, describes women's books as both 'dream children' and 'total strangers':

The child appearing in the dream that is the text is always much stronger than we are. We don't know where they came from. The child adopts us, we obey, then we abandon the child, though in fact it is the child who abandons us. Everything is reversible. Even if we think we are writing the book, it is the book that is leading us. We depend entirely on the book's goodwill. (1993: 78-9)

Men, too, cannot avoid using these metaphors to conceive of (to perform, to enact) their creativity (e.g. Sendak, 1977: 123).

To put this another way, at the moment before my annunciation, before I write, I forgo the univocality of announcement and enter the fullness of a relation with alterity. This enchanted moment of conception suspends inside and outside, and **performs** the religious experience of communion that Fra Angelico's Gabriel may have also signified.

Instead of announcing it, expressing it, I conceive the world's meaning. Knowledge doesn't take the form of a description or expression but rather the conception and rebirth of the world, the reenactment of creation. This is the word becoming flesh: the word 'occurs' to me, it 'strikes' me. It is also flesh becoming word, allowing me to write the world through my body. The divine is not here or there but is the flow between, the shiver of resonance, effervescence, communion, inspiration, the **possibility** of what Cixous calls 'reversibility'. It is Merleau-Ponty's 'flesh':

The painter ... **while he is painting** practices a magical theory of vision. He is obliged to admit that objects before him pass into him or else that ... the mind goes out through the eyes to wander among objects Max Ernst ... says rightly, 'Just as the role of the poet ... consists in writing under the dictation of what is being thought, of what articulates itself in him, the role of the painter is to grasp and project what is seen in him'.... Inevitably the roles between him and the visible are reversed. That is why so many painters have said that things look at them. Marchand says, after Klee: 'In a forest, I have felt many times that the trees were looking at me, were speaking to me... I was there, listening... I think that the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it.' (1974: 287-8)

The child or animist with an enchanted sense of talking trees would recognise much of my ordinary adult life. The computer nerd with a program, the driver with the car, the cook with ingredients, the musician with an instrument: while the outsider or the incompetent worker treats the world as a set of objects to be manipulated, the skilled worker engages with the world, listens to it, grants it the quasi-

subjectivity it needs to generate messages and relations. The skilled worker is the magician who has learned to make the world speak. For the footballer, the ball actually is alive; for the writer, the **bon mot** actually is happy (see Serres, 1995: 47-8)

The writer's animated relation to the world and text may later be re-enacted by the reader and the text. As Cixous insists, readers and texts can only work on each other, address each other, if they are in love. Otherwise, 'we are automatically at the wrong distance' (1988: 147). Texts and readers at the wrong distance feel inert or blase: they may want to shake each other into life or they may be resigned to speaking different languages.

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My relationship with the text I'm writing changes with mood, intended audience, the stage of the writing process, and so on. Texts can be lovers, dancers, spouses, guests, angels, ghosts, interrogators, forces of nature, wild animals, confidants, abductors, analysands, forests, pathways, buildings, dreams, students, teachers, colleagues, children. I enact the array of my life's relationships in my writing life. These figures allow me to interact **with** the text, to hear its annunciatory whispers. My task is to develop the best relationship for my purpose.

Writers often produce their first drafts through metaphors of being transported by the text's wild flow. Their responsibility, accordingly, is to ensure that fear and a desire for mastery don't restrict the flow:

We must know how to treat the dream as a dream, to leave it free.... We must let the dream transport us as Kafka lets his desire 'to be a Red Indian' transport him. We

must let ourselves be carried on the dream's mane and must not wake up - something all dreamers know - while the dream is dictating the world to us. How can we do this? We must write at the dictation of our master the dream, a pencil in hand, straddling the mane at full gallop. (Cixous, 1993: 107; cf. Woolfe and Grenville, 1993: 188; Mandelstam, 1974: 424)

But writing's relation with the text's alterity need not rely on such complete immersion. Ann Game, for example, discusses writing in relation to dressage:

The ideal of dressage is the realization of the potential in our body, in the horse's body; it involves an energy in a relation between two bodies.... One neither blocks nor pulls with hands, but, rather, rides a horse into them (impulsion is what matters, a going forward); so, she is in one's hands, in giving, soft hand. Even restraining hands give. If we block ourselves, we block the horse, we block our writing. (Game and Metcalfe, 1996: 101)

But how do we give the writing its head? How do we maintain the flow? Dillard talks of a writer who so prizes momentum and so fears self-consciousness that he leaves the house on errands just so he can hurry back and immediately retype everything he's written till then. His momentum carries him a few sentences further, and then he repeats the process (1989: 15). Likewise, many writers reread the previous pages until their bodies unconsciously discern a sign that shows where the text is headed. We talk of this as 'finding the thread', but this isn't a thread already laid from beginning to end; what I seek is a full-bodied confidence in following a potentiality that presently extends only a little past my nose.

For example, the first draft of my earlier discussion of inspiration was itself inspired, by the phrase 'occurs to me'. Before then I had been vainly trying to **make** my words sing or **force** the writing's lack to name itself. Then what I think I had wanted to say **occurred to me**, and I scribbled the vital paragraphs about the world's reversibility in the margins of the manuscript. This occurred not when I was expressing my thoughts or feelings, but when I allowed myself to hear and play with the text itself.

As part of the world beyond me, the text has much to tell me. Etymological play leads me to new points and connections (the creation of tropes reverses entropy); rhythms tell me when ideas are dancing; awkward paragraphing alerts me to elided arguments or lost connections; repetition tells me when I've lost the flow; a dull tone indicates a lost contact with the imaginary; a brittle tone warns me that the thinking has become disembodied and blase; weak conclusions identify areas where I've lost my courage or rigour. When I become stuck, a hairline fracture is demanding recognition and attention (Dillard, 1989: 9; Fitzgerald, 1965: 39ff).

When building up a first draft, if circumstances allow, I live my relation with the text through the tropes of lover and host, two relations that rely on attendant intimacy. The writing environment must be safe and private enough to allow the play of an intimacy that will transport me past mastery and good sense. I turn off the telephone, close my door and curtains, ignore the clock, play some deeply familiar music as an aid to concentration. When this writing takes off, it is a very passionate experience, whether feather-light, intense or laughing. It alters my pulse and breathing and escapes my self-consciousness, it sharpens my senses and makes me more intuitively aware of the desires of the other. Afterward, when 'real' life resumes, I feel an anticlimax. Later there may be guilt and jealousy about how I've spent my day.

Later again, in subsequent drafts, my relations with the text become more scrupulous and less absorbed in immediate points. Aware that I am only its temporary steward, my task becomes one of grooming and finishing the text for its independent future. Accordingly I go through it word by word and line by line, over and over, backwards and forwards, cutting whatever doesn't bear weight, shifting whatever is ungainly, trying to 'find' - produce - the text's true form. I take my measure neither from internal standards of Authenticity nor external ones of Truth, but from my feeling of the text's possibilities. This test often leads to conclusions that surprise me, even though they look inevitable in retrospect.

Cixous refers to this not-so-wild process as listening to the truth:

When I'm writing fiction, I begin with the inkling of a thought which is in the process of unravelling itself in front of me. I set off after it, trying to hear all its minute gradations as it works itself out. It's as if I am trying to record something in the process of being born. I listen, with all the ears of my body, trying to write it down. And my phrases are almost always insufficient, at one remove from the truth. I go over my phrase again and again, each time trying to get a little closer.... It's slow, painstaking work. But there is a model. The model, or example, which is my own thought, is there, before me. (Sellers, 1989: 69)

Painstaking processes of adding, cutting, shifting and polishing disappoint the Dionysian fantasy that inspired works pour forth unalloyed, but I am a writer and not a channel or medium. The 'authority' of the text I produce lies in its relationship with readers, and without the intervention of

Apollinian disciplines, my writing has little chance of inspiring readers. This said, inspired writing is more likely to result in daring and lively material for development with more patient, intellectual and critical modes of writing. Moreover, these severe sculptural processes involve their own forms of love and ecstatic frenzy (see Nietzsche, 1954: 518-21). Editorial work, too, is about the thrill and risk of renouncing authority and of learning from the text. This is why the creativity of editors embarrasses expressive writing.

If I attend closely and respectfully to the text's annunciations, then, it writes itself; if I try to master it, I choke off its ability to teach. My own writing often reminds me as reader of my passivity as writer. Though I too can say 'Who wrote the essay if not me?', the writing is not me or mine: I am made of flesh and blood and breath, not paper and ink. So I wonder where particular words and images came from, or whether I intended their reach. I smile at a nice phrase and frown at a bad. I'm surprised to recognise half-thoughts and obsessions - passions, demons - that I thought I'd forgotten or abandoned and I wonder how much influence they've had all along. (Am I a slave to my demons? And further: are they mine or am I theirs?) I wonder how these horrible pages could have felt so perfect yesterday, or how these perfect pages could have felt so horrible yesterday: 'what was I thinking?' I ask myself crankily. For moments at a time, when reading, I may feel that my writing has bridged the unsayable and sayable, but this is a body sense, and doesn't give me the capacity to finally announce what I've all along wanted to say. Introductions and Conclusions are never easy, even though I postpone them as long as possible.

At the end of writing, I hope to be surprised, and also utterly unsurprised, to see the article fall into place, as if it has written itself. The text is complete if I'm alive to ideas that feel like the forgotten origin of the project. I hope to be deliciously taken aback and fondly taken back. I'm

never quite sure, though, whether these are memories recalled or produced. Like **deja vu**, they recall what I've never quite known, they're uncanny reminders of hopes, intuitions and knowledge I've never quite had. Rather than expressing myself then, I write to momentarily satisfy or recognise or reach myself. Outside these moments, the text is always just beyond me.

* * *

If my own writing shocks me, it's more disturbing to encounter these haunted homecoming memories in someone else's work. Once, while preparing to write about shame in the coal mining industry (Metcalf, 1988), I 'happened' to read Fanon's **Black Skin, White Masks** (1970). And **there** was my unsayable, completely said. I was aghost: Fanon had taken **my** ideas. (This shows how the significative intent is much fuller than the product you're capable of producing.) Then I wondered if I might have forgotten having once read the book. Students have nightmares of being caught in such 'unconscious' plagiarism. It's the fear that we write in our sleep. It's the fear of the doppelganger.

Later, when I'd noted this uncanny feeling more often, I formulated a rule: intellectual 'breakthroughs' are the sustained development of flashes that everyone has already had. This was a private intuition. And then I discovered that it too had already been had:

Now I find that once more I have shrunk
 To an interloper, robber of dead men's dream,
 I had read in books that art is not easy
 But no one warned that the mind repeats
 In its ignorance the vision of others. I am still
 The black swan of trespass on alien waters.

It is worth noting that these lines, which I felt I should have written (it was **my** poem), were in fact 'written' in the 1940s by a non-author, 'Ern Malley'. Malley and his poetry were both concocted as the bait in an anti-modernist hoax. When the modernist avant-garde took the bait, and hailed the poems and their author, the trap was sprung and the hoax revealed. The modernists' inability to distinguish valuable poetry from nonsense was supposedly proved beyond doubt by Malley's non-existence: if the poems weren't expressions of a poet they couldn't mean anything (see Heyward, 1994).

There are, then, vivid and familiar experiences of the text as a vast stereophony and the author as passive. Although we tend to trivialise these everyday moments, because they escape comprehension by the story form we use to make ourselves authors of our own lives (see Levi-Strauss, 1986: 15; see Crites, 1989), writing and reading involve echoing, haunting, dreaming, possession, resonance, reverberation, uncanniness, angels, demons, drag, impersonation, misrecognition, rapture, clairvoyance, ecstasy. They involve the suspension (but not abolition) of conventional boundaries of inside and outside.

These entanglings with alterity can be hard to witness in writing. A slowly compiled text finally exists in a seamless abstract moment, allowing writers to edit their self-presentations until they can be passed off as expressions of thought already present in their minds. Speech, by contrast, dramatically manifests its relation with alterity. It is risky, open, momentary, with a body that gives too much away (see Barthes, 1991: 3). In speech, people often 'don't know what they're saying' and then cannot unsay what they've said. ('Did I really say that? Sorry, I got carried away. That's not like me. I don't know what came over me. I didn't mean what I said. What I really meant was') Most people, accordingly,

are terrified of public speaking's threat to their fantasies of self. Even telephone answering machines are resented for making unrehearsed performances indelible.

Alterity is only shameful, however, if the self is imagined from within a metaphysics of presence. Under conditions of play, which rule out a resolution of real identity, writers can approach alterity as a resource to be tapped and replenished. Alterity's play gave Barthes his joy in his own death as an author, and is the reason his writing inspires and delights readers (see Barthes, 1975). Instead of hiding behind writing's seamlessness, writers need to use the inky technology to nurture the wonder of alterity.

I find myself, then, in partial agreement with Emerson:

To believe your own thought... - that is genius.... A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages.... Great works of art teach us to abide our spontaneous impression Else tomorrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another. (1965: 240-41)

But where Emerson assumes personal possession of the gleams and flashes, I suggest that we reject their gift because we **don't** simply experience them as ours, because they challenge our self-assurance. Their reappearance in others' work also challenges our assumptions about the proprieties of inmost and outmost. In both cases, shame emerges from an individualism that fancies it can possess thoughts without being possessed **by** them.

I'm more interested by earlier conceptions of 'genius'. Before it came to mean an inherent individual quality, or a

person of transcendental mental superiority, it related to the author inspired by **genii**, guardian spirits and tutelary deities:

Not so long ago, we still distinguished ... the role of the intellect as master of its intentions, ... and on the other hand what was deemed the better role, that of genius, the demon, the muse, the unconscious. (Levinas, 1989: 151)

Accordingly, Serres pictures the writer at work in a small pool of light cast by the candle of a ghostly figure in the background:

Here is the reality of the process of writing: a small glimmer illuminates the initial moment of creativity - next to the writer, outside of him, outside of his body, his pen, his page, his table.... Who is the shadow that holds it? Is this an angelic figure that resembles him like a brother? Is it a demon seeking to put him to death? Or is it the owner of a storehouse or treasury in which he can fish, before then, in turn, taking his place as an intermediary? (1995: 132; original ellipsis; cf Gallop, 1988: 160ff)

Genius, for Serres, is this universal storehouse of prepositions, preceding signification, the spectrum of all possible colours, coming together in a white apparition. Or: genius is the archangel that guards every creator and mediates all relations.

I say archangel because **arche** means the capital, the well, the reserve, as well as the beginning. The guardian angel always places himself between us and others, as a rotunda [a rotating railways platform, connecting different tracks], in order to open up our capacities. But the archangel also embodies and offers this

storehouse. (1995: 133)

At first take, Serres is saying that signification draws its ink from the fathomless well of the divine. This claim points to the divine as Castoriadis points to the imaginary, as Crites points to sacred stories and as Turner points to social structure. But by presenting his own significations as 'a modern myth', Serres decisively shifts his distance: his book is inhabited by, unthinkable without, the divine. It is an annunciation. The assumptions that allow signification and sociality are our enactment of contact with the divine. While we feel and make viable use of these assumptions, very rarely, and only partially, do we awaken to them. Nevertheless, signification is always inspired, intuitive and performative, its 'dead' authors repeating Mary's assumption to heaven in their contact with the **arche**.

From this perspective, the writer's genius is a matter of ethics, of living graciously and generously with otherness, including the forms of otherness that we recognise in our own dreams, flashes and intuitions. In-tuition is not an inner knowledge we always-already possess; it's a process of allowing yourself to be instructed by the outside inside and the inside outside. In sharp contrast to Emerson, **this**, says Steiner, is the lesson of great art:

if much of poetry, music and the arts aims to 'enchant' - and we must never strip that word of its aura of magical summons - much also ... aims to make strangeness in certain respects stranger. It would instruct us of the inviolate enigma of the otherness in things and in animate presences.... [Serious art makes palpable to us] the unassuaged, unhoused stability and estrangement of our condition. We are, at key instants, strangers to ourselves, errant at the gates of our own psyche. We knock blindly at the doors of turbulence, of creativity,

of inhibition within the **terra incognita** of our own selves. (1991: 139)

Although I've habitually turned a blase ear to its wing beats, my experience of writing, then, is of a shocking and haunted process, far removed from the expressive model. To paraphrase Levi-Strauss, I cannot say if I'm writing sociology or if sociology is writing me: it makes as much, and as little, sense to say that the combination of signs results from its meaning as to say the reverse (Castoriadis, 1987: 137; Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 402ff).

* * *

While I live a range of relationships in my writing, the process is finally dominated by the figure of writer as parent and text as child. And children are angels, messengers from elsewhere, moving through.

On their way through, children/texts remind you sharply of your mortal condition, of love's intermingling with the inevitability of separation and loss, of the wonderful and impossibly painful proximity of alterity, of the disconcerting reversibility of 'possession', of the passivity of rapture, of the playful joy of living in a world that responds, of the inevitability and possible exuberance of change and re-birth. Their blessing is a sharper, deeper, more vivid sense of life.

A parent sees the trace of the child's heavenly condition in the downy light of their skin, but, though they try, they know they can never touch it. Parents embrace their children so closely because they know, from the moment of the child's birth, that they can **never** hold the child: it is always and already beyond them. The child intrudes in their lives, possesses their hearts, but is always going to be other. This

is what's at stake in the Annunciation; it is why Mary conceives of herself through the mystery of Gabriel. And so it is with our writings. Their mysterious otherness holds mastery at bay, but is the source of bliss, wonder, inspiration and learning.

When we publish, we launch or release the writings that were never really ours. It is a moment of proud accomplishment and, simultaneously, loss. Writers cannot protect texts once they've come out in the world, they cannot predetermine what their readers will make of them. The text is not the author's voice, and it is presumptuous for the writer to speak for the text. Writers wonder what will become of their dream-children, and wonder, says Irigaray, 'is a mourning for the self as an autarchic entity' (1993: 75).

Publication can also, however, be joyous: it is comforting and thrilling to think that the text you've worked with can live a life beyond your imaginings. But it is also comforting and joyous to know that the author isn't responsible for forever defending the past text; that they can move on themselves; that they can re-create or re-conceive of themselves. The final blessing given to writers by the angel, their child, is the tender insistence that they too must move on. The death of the author is the re-birth of the writer.

Note

Coming directly from an immensely inspiring relation with my colleague Ann Game, this article takes up themes touched upon in our recent book **Passionate Sociology**. I dimly recognised but didn't know how to develop these themes until moved by Catherine Clement's marvellous book **Syncope**. I'd also like to thank: Max, Leo and Anita Sibrits for their tuition; Liz Turnbull, who reminded me of a key passage from Merleau-Ponty at just the right time; the students who pushed these issues in our subject **Performing Sociology**; and those who attended an early version of this paper at the Anthropology Seminar at Macquarie University.

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