

Eye mySelf

by

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## Abstract

Eye mySelf is a narrative inquiry into the word “self.” A discursive object (Danziger, 2003; Cushman, 1990), “self” saturates the everyday language of reflexivity and remains a familiar feature of psychological literature and therapy. I have become familiar with it in my own life: I have a Bachelor’s degree in Psychology; I have participated in a year of Counselling Psychology coursework and supervised training; and from the age of two or three I participated in a therapeutic community, a community to which I belonged for close to 20 years.

I know myself.

Or do I? Do I know my “self”? How it works? What it does, or might do? I am suspicious. I think my “self” might be getting away with something, and I want to explore this suspicion. As a narrative inquiry into my own remembered experience of “self,” this thesis explores language *via* language, and rests on Jacques Derrida’s (1991, 2000) thought about signs, signatures, and testimony, Judith Butler’s (2004) thought about how we might be given over to each other, and Michel Foucault’s (1990) thought about discourse, confession, and sexuality. It is organized as a collection of *pensées* (Leggo, 1990) – thoughts, explorations, imaginings, wandering wonderings about “self” – with the hope of generating a salient and palpable resonance between the pieces (Heraclitus, 1987), a resonance of possibility for how “self” might work, what it might do, how it does *you* and *I*, your “I” and my “I”, (or is that “eye?”), and what that might come to do to *us*.

In line with Butler’s (2004) conceptions of the body as that which bears the human, I want to evoke how it might feel to bear, perhaps by baring, a “self.” I mean to arouse suspicion for this baring, for this “self,” and its place. To this end, I eye my “self.”

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**Preface: A Disclaimer**

There are pieces of writing in this thesis that resemble events from my personal life. Contrary, perhaps, to the aims of traditional research, I have made no effort to preserve anything like accuracy – this is not supposed to be a historical chronicle. It is a remembering, a remembering of mood, of language, of thoughts, of things spoken; I am writing to evoke, not to record. And so, where I am describing events in a narrative fashion, I am making no claim about their historical veracity. They should be thought of as fictional insofar as I have made no effort to substantiate the accuracy of what they relate. Because this is an exploration into how language works, it is the language of remembering and recitation that I believe is of the most importance, not any truth that language may seek to front. And so: any characters found within this text are only loosely based on memories, and have been modified in name and description to protect from the possibility of any sort of identification. In some cases, descriptions of characters found here are aggregates of remembered personalities. In many cases, they are *entirely* fictional, based more on my remembered feeling of the tone and atmosphere of the events I describe.

Despite my loose attention to accuracy, there are some basic facts on which this personal account must rest. First, I had my initial experience of what I describe as a psychotherapeutic community at a very young age, and I participated in this community until I was about twenty-one years old. So, for close to twenty years, I attended, in varying frequency, weekly group therapy, monthly one-on-one appointments, semi-annual therapy weekend workshops; I participated in psychodramas, as witness, as primary character, as a supporting cast; and I underwent a drug-accompanied (sodium amytal) group therapy exercise three times. The presence here of my accounts of these events is less to provide any conclusions about this

community so much as it is to provide the salience of the linguistic environment in which I took part for many years.

The second fact is that my parents also participated in this community. And it is that fact I wish to address, for I have mentioned them at times in this thesis. One might be tempted to question their judgment upon reading these accounts (I am their son, and you may wonder how they could have let me participate in such things). I would hope the reader would consider the following:

The primary responsibility for this community and its activities rested with a licensed psychiatrist who had a legitimate practice. This was no secret sect. And by virtue of being such a professional, his practice carried no small measure of promise. Outside of blatantly losing trust for this professional, there was not much else that might have made people wonder that maybe something “wrong” was going on. Recently, in a year of supervised counseling practice, I learned that a client’s trust was paramount for a successful counseling relationship. And though a counselor may quickly acknowledge that they could never be an expert on someone else’s life, the very position of “counsellor” might connote such expertise anyway. And once trust is placed in the health professional, it is potentially very difficult for a client to then doubt that professional outside of an egregious breach of that trust. Indeed, any hints of expertise might serve to *enhance* trust. Do we fault the client? I think not. Abuse of trust is exactly that – you do not fault the one who trusts. I do not fault my parents for their trust in this psychiatrist, or his practice. Rather, I honour their courage to seek help in a time when they felt our family needed it.

And they were not alone. There were many of us – adults and children. We all believed this was good for us, that we were being helped. At many times, it felt so intoxicatingly helpful



that the thought of losing it was a bit frightening. It is hard to question something that feels right when it is being offered by a trusted professional, and when you are surrounded by others who also believe in it or its potential as much as you do.

Finally, some of the events I describe in this thesis are events of which my parents had no knowledge before this writing because there was a high value for confidentiality with regard to the group and drug-accompanied sessions. For me, writing about these times and events is my attempt to explore the language I remember, the language I recite, even now, knowingly, unknowingly. We lived it, breathed it, drank it, loved it, reproduced it, this language of “self,” liberated our “true selves” to live “authentically,” and in doing so, perhaps we actually *did* our “selves,” actualized the *us* of us as Authentic Individuals, in language, with language, as language.

This is going to be a thesis about writing and language, and it will live on the edges of moments both recounted and present, having been etched even as they are etched again, ever caught for capture and ever failing to catch, ever cited for recitation, ever fragmented from the past even as I recite in the present what and how I have lived, how I has failed, what and how I has and have been cited, sighting myself, my Self, here and now, and ever only at the point of starting, thus, I will be written (again).

## Acknowledgments

How does one encapsulate gratitude? Is it something bounded and given? Or is it, rather, some moment of vulnerability, perhaps a continuing one, and one that is now, in being acknowledged, only ever continual? I am here for many reasons. But many people have been there for me, and I am grateful to them: Dr. Marla Buchanan, for her belief in my ability to write, and for being a poem in my life at an important moment, for poetry brings possibility to life, and she made this all possible with the following words: *"You need to be in writing," "If you want to write something, anything, as a part of your program here, you let me know."* I will never forget this. Dr. Carl Leggo, for exemplifying what it means to live in courage in the academy, to live with heart, and for celebrating how poetry, in writing, may accent such a life. Dr. Karen Meyer, for being witness to this at the eleventh hour, and for once expressing a suspicion of this thing called "safety" in a conversation in a hallway some time ago. Dr. Lorraine Weir, for challenging me to let go of the need to contain, for teaching me how to think with more subtlety and how to remain in the mess and in contention. My family, for their courage in allowing me to delve into the memory of a dark time, for being exposed to it all yet again, and for their constant support and unwavering belief in me. Sarah Jane Jamieson, for always listening, no matter how long or random my monologue became, and for: *"I think you could write a kick-ass thesis."* Steve Musson, for teaching me where my words lay unspoken. Yvonne Brown, for being a mother when I wasn't expecting one. Suzanne Kyra, for helping me step, helping me sit, helping me fight, helping me walk. All the friends I find surrounding me in my life. For them, I am truly blessed. And finally, my deep gratitude to Jeff Shoub, for his response to my very first poems: *"Chris, I hope you continue to write."*

Hope is so much.

## Dedication

*To those of us who now remember,  
Wide-eyed, chilled, and filled with awe,  
The things that happened to us then,  
The shadows that we never saw.*

*Mrs. Dalloway:* Have you been skipping pills?

*Richard:* ...'course, I can't take this.

*Mrs. Dalloway:* Take what?

*Richard:* Trying to be proud and brave in front of everybody.

*Mrs. Dalloway:* Oh... Honey it's not a performance.

*Richard:* Of course it is! I got the prize for my performance...

*Mrs. Dalloway:* Well that is nonsense.

*Richard:* ...I got the prize for having AIDS and going nuts, being brave about it, I actually got the prize for having come through...

*Mrs. Dalloway:* Its' not true.

*Richard:* ...For surviving [*Mrs. Dalloway:* It's not true] that's what I got the prize for. Oh you think they would have given it to me if I were healthy?

*Mrs. Dalloway:* Yes, as a matter of fact, I do.

*Richard:* (pause) Is it here somewhere?

*Mrs. Dalloway:* What?

*Richard:* The prize, I'd like to look at it.

*Mrs. Dalloway:* No, you haven't gotten it yet. It's tonight.

*Richard:* Are you sure? I remember the ceremony perfectly. I seem to have fallen out of time.

....

*Mrs. Dalloway:* Richard... you won't need to do anything. All you have to do is appear.

**Caught**

*My thesis starts at three years old.*

When I was a kid,

I

might not have been.

When I was a kid I was given a gift. It was a hockey stick with a curved blade like a candy cane. All red and delicious, with a golden yellow ball that mirrored the sun like when it glints in your eye while you take a picture, temporarily blinding you while temporally, the things you want to capture *shift* – the quick flash of the nothing between the quanta of life, ever discreet, and following: your eyes, your thoughts, your itchy capturing fingers – it all shifts.

This red hockey stick was given to me by my father. Or, perhaps both of my parents gave it to me, though my memory is of the first time I played with my dad. Lucky him – perhaps they flipped a coin?

Flip.

I am on the playground. Brown chord pants. Stumpy corduroy legs bending at my young and awkward knees, body pulled solely by my spun imagination, sun glinting and following that yellow ball of dreams as it races over the dirty pavement, thoughts of big kids banished from my mind, no more wary edge of safety, a field of possibility and I am the centre, ever, and in every frame, centre.

Glint.

But nobody took that picture, thankfully. It lives, (therefore... there for?), in my head, or wherever things live that we like to assume are in our heads, even in us, if *in* is even the right word.

Glint.

Smack! Look at my dad go! He hit that ball, and I can too! Whack! There it goes all yellow and sunshine, scaring pigeons away like my dreams and I race to catch up, catch this moment, and perhaps I have, or perhaps in this moment now, as I write:

I

Am caught.

I I I I I I  
I I I I I I  
I I I I I I

## My Rite

Writing, wondering,  
Wandering writing.

A rite?  
I wonder and wander:  
Is it right  
To write a rite  
From wonder  
If wonder is a  
Wandering?

Or by wandering  
Right to the moment of wonder  
Can I then write  
My rite  
Of wandering  
Through wonder, and  
Wonder up my right? My rite?  
Can I only write right?

It is my right, right?  
No. It is my rite:  
My write

-ing.



*Richard:* I wanted to write about it all. Everything that happens in a moment. The way the flowers looked when you carried them in your arms, this towel how it smells how it feels, this thread... all our feelings, yours and mine... the history of it... who we once were...everything in the world... everything all mixed up... like it's all mixed up now. And I failed. I failed. No matter what you start with, it always ends up being so much less.

- *The Hours* (Daldry, 2002).

**“A pass is a gift”** (A man I knew once, personal communication, a long time ago)

I knew I was a passer, knew that I loved giving the puck in times and places where it was entirely unexpected, putting that rubber on the tape of a teammate so perfectly that his body would simply react to the felt “tock” of it hitting the blade: he’d shoot and score before he even realized what was happening.

Well, that was the fantasy at least. I might modestly state that I did, in fact, make that sort of thing happen on numerous occasions, which is cool, or, at least it was cool when it happened, cool that I can say that, and what happens when I say that now, write that, and did I need to? Indeed, I only said that I “might” state it, yet obviously, I just did.

That last paragraph is an example of the kind of writing you’ll find here. It sort of *happens*, much like that puck would happen on someone else’s stick, except here, in the writing, I feel very much like the person scoring. I wonder if you do? My writing seeks and plays, “performs...” as Carl Leggo (1990) describes:

...an ongoing pageant in which I seek to make sense out of nonsense and nonsense out of sense, order out of chaos and chaos out of order, solution out of dissolution and dissolution out of solution, illusion out of disillusion and disillusion out of illusion. (p. 6)

My writing is restless. And because it is restless, it pushes against and collides with certain ideas, it dances with them, and I feel that if I do not outline those ideas clearly at some points in this thesis then it might begin to feel like a garbled mess. Much like hockey: if you’ve never seen a game before, and you do not have someone to answer your questions or to give you a sense of how to find the patterns the players skate, it can also seem like a garbled mess, a smorgasbord of speed and chaos and violence, an awe-full-ness, an always-crash, a non-redeeming spectacle.

So I am challenged to *pass* this thesis to you, to make this a gift. I hope I can outline the ideas that I approach in such a way that they will emerge as a presence of some sort, that they will haunt this text with enough salience to provide a lingering and graspable sense of the possibilities that might haunt the language I am writing about, namely: language of “self.” This is not about ratifying “self” as some construct, discursive or historical (Danziger, 2003; Cushman, 1990). It is to jump into the language of the modern concern with selfhood (Baumeister, 1987) and to evoke the sense of how this language, the word “self”, *does* things, does things to people, or rather, does, *effects* “people” in certain ways. This thesis does not intend to answer the how’s and why’s of this language. Instead, it drives its momentum from my own memories and sense of having been done by that language, having consumed that language as an individual in this culture, as a student of Psychology, and as a member of a therapeutic community for most of my young life. My experience is not meant to be evidence. It is meant to be a narrative inquiry – an exercise in language, with language, in order to make salient some possibilities for what language of “self” might do.

You will find a collection of things here: stories, poems, theoretical musings, all of which I hope will combine to evoke possibilities for how “self” might do what it does. But the pieces do not necessarily flow nicely into one another. No, they are a messy collection of things that rest together for the purpose of generating something, perhaps, in between them. Is that where wisdom generates? In the black unknown of the in-between? I am not sure. The ancient wisdom of Heraclitus (1987), *Fragments*, comes to us in such a way. Of such organization, translator T.M. Robinson writes:

In a word, the *language* Heraclitus uses and the way he uses it are of critical importance, for in the complexity and interrelatedness of language we see a verbal counterpart to the complexly interrelated universe itself. (p. 5)

Quoting another scholar, Robinson continues:

In this respect Kahn talks usefully of the “linguistic density” of Heraclitus’ writing, “the phenomenon by which a multiplicity of ideas are expressed in a single word or phrase” (p. 89), and of its “resonance,” that “relationship between fragments by which a single verbal theme or image is echoed from one text to another in such a way that the meaning of each is enriched when they are understood together.” (Heraclitus, 1987)

Perhaps, then, if I “gift” this thesis properly, a resonance will resound between the pieces, between words and ideas. And it will be unique each time; for every set of eyes, for every “I” coming to this writing, reading these words and citing, something unique will happen. How might I control such an enterprise? How might “I” control it? Perhaps I don’t (doesn’t)? But I can provide an image to organize these thoughts: It is a tree, one inspired by an online animation created by Robert Penner called *Fractal Dancer* (Penner, n.d.) that you may find by clicking “fractal dancer” at <http://www.robertpenner.com/index2.html>. For a static image, please see Figure 1 (below). *Fractal Dancer* allows you to create and record a dance for the tree – your interaction with the tree provides a print by which it will live and breathe for you, over and over, reciting the dance you have given it in front of your eyes every new time you interact with it. It is different for everyone. It is the same tree.

When my tree dances, I think of the trunk as made from Derrida’s (2000, 1991) thoughts about signs and the “I”, Butler’s (2004) thought about the human and touch, and Foucault’s (1990) thought about discourse and confession. The branches make up the remembered stories I

have lived and that I relate because they vary with each remembering, creaking and swaying as branches might do, and written here still (and can you write something into stillness?), thus anchored ever by the trunk, and ever bearing their leaves: my words, language. And these language leaves rustle in every breath of life given to this thesis, every reading, every recitation: the leaves rustle, the words cite and fragment their linguistic existence (Derrida, 1991) even while they make up the dance anchored by the trunk and supported by my remembering, my writing.

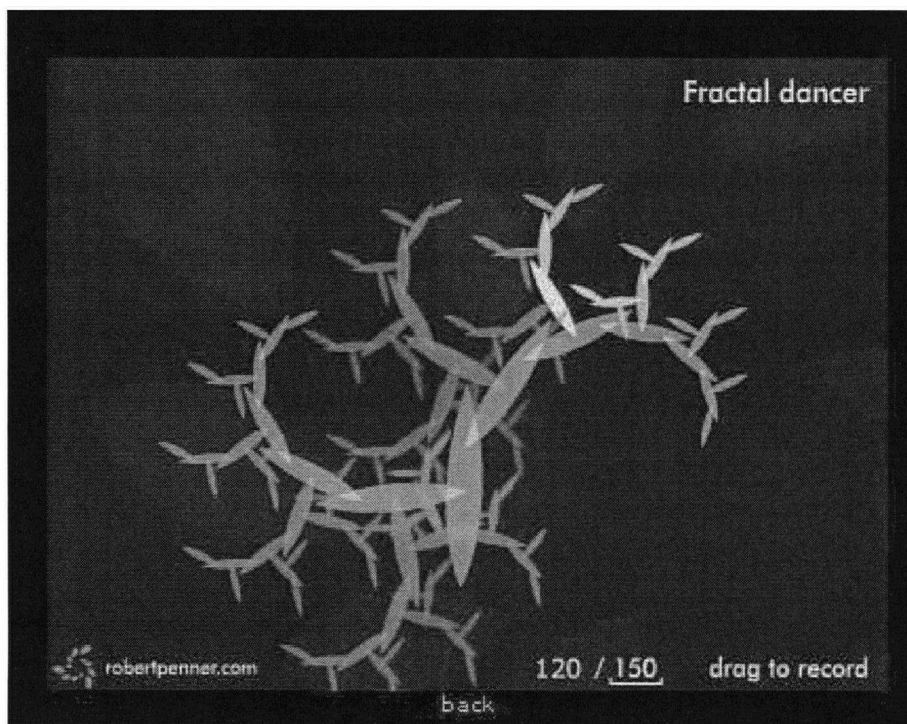


Figure 1: *Fractal Dancer*, [www.robertpenner.com/index2.html](http://www.robertpenner.com/index2.html), click: "fractal dancer"

**Fractal Tree**

My fractal tree, language,  
Turns words to the sun,  
Drinks a distilled light,  
Saps its knowledge,  
Its blood, as it dances  
Your breath,  
Rustles leaves as I breathe  
Too,  
The dappled cast  
Shadows, confused  
Implications of language  
We use. When it's hot  
I can nap in their  
Sporadic shelter,  
Confused as I am  
Myself,  
Shivering.

*Shiver*: "to break into many small pieces" (*Shiver*, n.d.)

**Beginning**

I feel it today:  
The Beginning.  
And when it ends,  
I will remember it:  
Another beginning.

I am the November leaf in March.  
From crackling gossamer veins,  
My brittle vellum skin  
Hangs loosely in  
Brown  
Ragged  
Flaps.

I am the windswept autumn tree,  
Grey with bark  
And soggy with rain.  
My withered branches reaching, creaking,  
Stunted  
By many  
Broken  
Fingers.

In Spring,  
Each again  
Sprouts the same  
Leave(s).

In Fall,  
Each again  
A-leave-iates,  
Is left behind,  
Leaves a 'leaving.

## Another Beginning

Excerpt from a Journal Entry dated February 6, 2006:

*I guess it's my own fault really. Whatever that means. Maybe I'm apologizing. Why am I always apologizing? I was the one who said "okay – I will be done by June." I don't remember who I said it to. And I wonder about why I said it – wonder about giving myself six months to finish a thesis when it feels like all I've ever done is*

*Started.*

*I'm still starting. I start and start and start. I have close to 75 starts. And here is another one. And each start spans up to five pages. And I'm counting pages. And I'm way past the number required for a finished thesis.*

*And all I do is start.*

*I want to travel across the country. I have for most of my life. It was one of those childish dreams that you can't reason out – you just want to do it. It probably came to me at some odd moment. Maybe I was playing tag with some kids, or eating my Kraft Dinner, or throwing my dirty socks in the laundry hamper baffled by my new understanding that one of my friends wore the same socks for a whole week and that was why my parents made him take his socks off not his shoes because the smell was so bad even though I never smelled it but you never can tell with parents – they're so unpredictable.*

*But one day, one moment like that, and I was thinking, " You know, I'd like to travel across Canada." Maybe it was a moment in elementary school when I looked at the map and saw that Canada was the second biggest country in the world, and besides it had a cool looking outline, not boxy like the 'States, and with many islands up top, second only to Russia, and I'm*



*Russian, or my dad is, so really, I span this world, don't I? – I may as well travel that distance; may as well walk my body and see what I'm made of, right?*

*Right?*

*So when my friends told me that their plan was to drive across the country this summer, and when I realized that this was the only time in my life where friends actually brought this up to me rather than nodding heads as I meandered on about how I'd like to do it, I decided that I wanted to do it this summer which meant finishing the thesis by June which meant more starting and starting and these sentences just never end, do they?*

*But I want to say something very clearly:*

*Writing your life is writing it.*

*Living it is living it.*

*And the two can be separate or not, depending on how much you want to write in your life. How much of your life you want to be writing, or at least, at it. Indeed, I want to leave the metaphor behind. Because I'm sitting here in my red ant-strewn pj pants which I love and my comfy Hard Rock Café Dubai long tee–, typing away at a keyboard because it feels significant and I love the way my fingers move so quick and hit exactly the right key without me thinking about it. So many right moves and I just do it, and don't have to think about it.*

*I just do it.*

*And I don't have to think about it.*

*And so I find myself starting and starting and starting with this writing and wondering if I'll finish and wonder if what I'm writing is even what I want to write because it may not be the living I want to do, sitting here typing, though I love it still. Because all I've done up until now*

*this morning is research photography schools thinking about how much I want to be a photographer.*

*I want to travel across Canada this summer. And I want to be a photographer. And I want the courage to do it – the courage to do it even if I don't finish my thesis. Even if I only ever start. And maybe I'll just submit a whole pile of starts, because in the end, the living part of it is the end, is it not?*

*I need the courage to walk away from what needs finishing insofar as that need becomes a devaluation of my start. Walk away from completion even insofar as I simply walk, simply move.*

*All there ever is  
Is the starting.*

## Derrida's Marks

In his article, *Signature Event Context*, Jacques Derrida (1991) outlines a conceptualization of language that locates what language does in language itself rather than in any kind of intentionality or consciousness. I have not read Derrida broadly at all, and do not intend to put his ideas forth as some kind of proof or argument. Rather, the mechanics of Derrida's thought on signs, words, and language provides an interesting poetic, one that the poems and stories in this thesis work about and around, one that they massage.

Though you may not know it, I actually copy-n'-pasted much (but not all) of that business about "passing" from some previous writing I did. I do not remember when I did it (wrote it or copied it?), but I have replicated it, duplicated it, well, duplicated *something*, though what *was* now *is* (in that it resides *here*, or is that "there"?), and is very arguably something quite different from what I originally copied simply because I have modified it, grafted it, spliced it. Indeed, had I not identified myself as the original writer, would you have ever known? I might cite myself, (Yakimov, 2006), to indicate that I have written this. But do you even know me? Who sits here speaking to you through these ever reproduced letters, ever read, ever ready (like the battery), something ever-charged (are you reading this digitally)? I might sign the piece, thus:

An effect I must credit to Derrida (1991, p. 109). And so who resides here now? Who remains? What remains but my signature (so is there even a "who" to speak of)? And if you think about what I have just written, does it make sense that I have said things like "I might sign the piece, thus" or "I might cite myself" given that I actually then did those things? Do my allusions to intention even matter?

Such is the thought Derrida brings to bear upon signs, words, written, spoken, syntax, sentences, etc. For Derrida (1991):

Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of this opposition), as a small or large unity, can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion. This does not suppose that the mark is valid outside its context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center of absolute anchoring. This citationality, duplication, or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is not an accident or an anomaly, but is that (normal—abnormal) without which a mark could no longer even have a so-called normal functioning. What would be a mark that one could not cite? And whose origin could not be lost on the way? (p. 97)

As a piece of writing then, a collection of marks and signs, I want to consider this thesis in Derrida's light. Indeed, one might ask whether I, in fact, *must* do so after having brought Derrida to bear. But more exciting for me is that Derrida's ideas are quite fitting for anyone engaged in poetry, for every time a word is spoken, written, *cited*, re-iterated (Derrida, 1991, p. 90), it is at one time shattered from its original context (the last time it was spoken, said, read), as well as brought to bear in the burgeoning moment, thereby "engender[-ing] infinitely new contexts" (p. 97). Language, for Derrida, is infinitely generative.

This is a very important difference from the idea that a word can be understood *via* context. To do so requires that we know the bounds of the context in which that word arises. But how could we ever know such a thing? For to bound the context is itself an act of definition similar (if not identical) to what conceptually occurs with the very sign for which we're seeking a context. And so now the context is itself within a context, which is within a larger context, etc.

unto infinity. For Derrida, it is impossible to know what a word means insofar as that meaning is something that the sign inscribes in a knowable context, for context is ever and always nonsaturable, and therefore, unknowable. Understanding it is an endeavor akin to understanding the edge of an infinite universe.

But surely one's intention in using a spoken or written sign betrays at least some presence of context, some knowable contextual modifier, doesn't it? If I say the words, "I'm gone," then knowing my intention surely provides a look into what my utterance means or does, right? But to posit intention in order to discern what might inhere as meaning in a sign is to encounter the same problem of context. In order for any listener/reader to "get it," there must be some access to the context of that word's utterance, a context which now includes (or is defined by) the speaker's intention. Even if the "outside" context of the speech act were knowable, saturable, I must still be able to get inside the speaker's head if I am to know what the speaker was intending to say, or intending to do by saying. Unfortunately, by virtue of the position that speakers have a head to get *into*, I am rendered forever barred from doing so because I too must therefore have such a head in which I currently reside, and how would I ever get outside my own inside to get inside the head of another?

For a context to be exhaustively determinable... it at least would be necessary for the conscious intention to be totally present and *actually transparent*... since it is a determining focal point of the context. The concept of or quest for the 'context' therefore seems to suffer here from the same theoretical and motivated uncertainty as the concept of 'ordinary,' from the same metaphysical origins: an ethical and teleological discourse of consciousness. (p.105, italics added)

This is not to say that speakers don't intend to do things. Nor is it to say that words do not do things. It is to clarify that understanding how words function cannot be an enterprise dependent on a notion of context, even intent. For Derrida, contexts are nonsaturable and generated in citation, even as that citation breaks the sign from whatever context it has been in before. If a word required a context to be understood, or rather, to burgeon with something (meaning, perhaps), then every time a word was cited, the original context in which its meaning had been developed would be required to somehow be present. And that simply cannot be the case because the word was just repeated, just recited, in the present context. The sign was broken from any original context, and here's a new one, a nonsaturable one, and so how could a sign's communicability ever be tied to context in any *knowable* way?

...one can always lift a written syntagma from the interlocking chain in which it is caught or given without making it lose every possibility of functioning, if not every possibility of "communicating," precisely. Eventually, one may recognize other such possibilities in it by inscribing or *grafting* it into other chains. No context can enclose it. Nor can any code, the code being here both the possibility and impossibility of writing, of its essential iterability (repetition/alterity). (p. 93)

Words cite and fragment contexts even as they emerge within them. For the poet, the idea that "one may recognize other such possibilities in it [words]," is exciting. Derrida locates what words do in words themselves. Speaking words cites words, brings them to bear, describes their living, their doing. It is a vastly *less* controlled enterprise than any performative notion of language might be comfortable with. It is not you or I who cite. It is the sign that, in being recognized and deemed as such (by virtue of its repeatability), repeats, cites, and generates possibility with every utterance, iterates by virtue of that repeatability or consequent

recognizability (the latter word included here if we must cling to a recogniz-*er* in our conceptualization).

So how is a sign communicable? Iterability may render it functional, but how do we know *what* a sign means? Well, a sign functions by inscribing something in the general space of its possibility, namely, everything that it is *not* (for what else is a sign but some definition, some cutting out from, or lifting out from, something else?). The idea is that you cannot know the *else* part just because you used a sign – the sign is the centre of its own nonsaturable context. Derrida (1991) writes that this “is not the simple negativity of a lack, but the emergence of the mark” (p. 93). Signs emerge from, and therefore imply, everything that they are not. And because they cite, that attendant lingering *everything*, in being implied, though not being named or cited, is rendered generally *present*.

Suddenly “self,” as a word, is just chock-full of humans! Wait no, not full – nobody else is named by “self,” but everyone else is generally *present*. We haunt each other, “we’re undone by each other” (Butler, 2004, p. 19). And as with the implied presence of everything a sign is not by virtue of its circumscription of that which it is, any original context from which that sign came, while not being preserved in any pure sense, might also be rendered somewhat present. In being reiterable, a sign bears (indeed, may even be best defined by) a kind of history of itself. A sign that is never recognized is like that proverbial tree in the forest that nobody hears (well, until someone hears it): it is a sort of potential. But the instant the sign is read, the reading of it, the recognition, is the emergence, the citation, the new context, the generally implied everything *else*, the fragmentation from the past nonsaturable context and consequent creation of a history: A sign very well could be thought of as a “now and then,” that is only and ever “right now.”

## Face

One day I whispered to myself,  
While in the mirror I was gazed,  
That I might make an effigy,  
A plaster casting of my face.

I did so and I found it plain,  
For I did not have paint or ink  
And so I thought to find a sheet,  
A linen cover from my closet,  
Bed sheets I had never used,  
A soothing layer ne'er abused,  
But present, so I snatched it there  
And covered close my doubled face.

I watched the sheet hang loosely from  
The face I'd cast, all black now from  
The coloured sheet (for it was black)  
And draping there down to my feet.

A ghost I held, beheld, beholden,  
Face like mine, not golden like the sun,  
But black like space and time  
And stretching ever to the floor  
In waves of bed sheet, all the more.  
The "more" that it did not require  
Hung loose and gave it all its weight,  
Its form and substance, there attired,  
My face had drawn a line of fate.  
Or rather, I had, draping this  
Black bed sheet on this plaster cast,  
This re- production of my self,  
There coloured in a linen black,  
There lifted from the drape of all  
That it was not, a ghost of what  
I might have been, and never am,  
A likeness I had never sought.

It freaked me out, that ghostly face,  
All black and draped there in my hand.  
I quickly gathered all the folds remaining,  
Covered it with extra layers,  
Draped it ever thicker, constantly,  
And all the quicker ,  
For my face did not abate;  
It sat there staring,  
Mouth agape.  
Or is that mine  
In fear, left open? -  
Words in silence  
Never spoken.



## History and “Age”

*These marks I make upon this page  
emerge from an incumbent rage.*

Well, no they don't. Not *really*. I just thought this was a good rhyme. *Really* (though how else would I clarify that? “Un- really”?).

It's funny how page and rage sound the same but look so different. Each encloses something that *is* the same: “age.” But are the age of page and the age of rage different? Or do they have the same age? Though I've obviously written one before the other, you might again consider my access to copy n' paste functionality and that I very well could have given birth to my rage well before writing this page. Hold on, I think I've just made some sort of funny shift here, some sort of splice. Can one talk of words as words and not as what they mean? Of course! I am about to do so. It seems that meaning is a fleeting thing, though it also seems that it finds a way to haunt whatever discussion those words find themselves in. And so I find that with age I may do many things.

But communicating with “age” requires that “age” be the same “age” I originally started with. And though, on a conceptual level this makes sense (because if I employ a word that is not the same as “age” to mean “age,” things might get confusing), it is also interesting because to use an “age” which is the same “age,” and yet obviously different (for there are two of them, and they are in different places on this page, so are they the same?) implies that despite their different ages (chronologically), as a singular sign “age”, it (or they?) is (or are?) always and ever being reborn, a perpetual moment of origin, an always-beginning even as it begs a history with every start.

Okay, I have been poetic. “Age” is a word by itself. But the “age” in “page” and “rage” are not words – they cannot be understood as singular parts for they do not function that way in

their current idiographic contexts (p- and r- respectively). So, by virtue of these respectively different contexts, each of these “age”-s can be thought of as unique. But I would like to challenge this. For as I scribe it again (age!), I *see* the age in page:

**page!**

I see the age in rage:

**rage!**

They are right there, and I cannot help but muse that they must be *identical*. With the help of this software I’m using, I can very reliably assert that the “age”-s I just typed (meaning those ones up there, not the one I just typed to refer to them, or does that even matter?) are morphologically *exactly* the same as the “age” residing inside “page” and “rage” right now, even as I type them in this sentence once again. They are digital fonts. Copies.

Bear with me here (or bear me, my writing, here: hear) because I am not writing this to be flip or banal. There is something important here, hear: For what happens when I type “age” but simply another repetition of that set of marks we call the word “age”? By calling it a word, perhaps I elicit a consideration of linguistic or idiographic context, of the precursor p- or r- in the first writings above, or of something we commonly describe as “semantics.” But without the mark, “age,” one might never get to anything like linguistic context or semantics. Without these letters and their current combination, “page” and “rage” could not exist. Something fundamental must happen upon inscription, upon the writing/reading, for these things to emerge, for letters, words, sentences to *happen*.

I want to create a new word that means the same thing that “age” does. Here it is:

*est:*

Now, do you recognize this word? Can you? Arguably, because I've told you what it means, you might actually recognize it from now on. Indeed, you may have almost pre-recognized it, having known that it would mean something the same as that described by the scratchings:

*age*

So:

*age* = *hist:*

But how about this word?:

*gn*

Does *it* mean anything? And if it does, if you have a meaning for it (as of course you may), is it communicable now by itself? Is that a sign right there? Arguably, it is not – without a referent, or without a shared recognition, or some semantic overlap, that sign cannot be communicable.

*gn*

But look at that – I just wrote it again. And you probably recognized it. Whether I've given a semantic to it or not, by virtue of the first time that sign ever existed, it is now doing *something*. You have seen it before, you know where, you know who made it, you know all of this without knowing what that sign *means*. The sign simply emerges by its recognizability, a quality attributable solely to its reproducibility. You and I are only required insofar as we effect that reproduction.

## A Brief Word on Citations

Given Derrida's discussion of citation, perhaps it is fitting to acknowledge something about the process of academic citation in this thesis. You will find a number of references within this text to ideas that are, perhaps, well known. An example might be *existential guilt*, which is the condition that expresses that one has always been free to choose, and therefore is ultimately responsible for any feelings of unfulfilled potential (Corey, 2001). This idea derives from Victor Frankl's (1992) existential thought in his book *Man's search for meaning*. Given the latter sentence, why have I cited a secondary source in the former? My main reason is this: I do not seek to qualify the ideas I cite in this text, do not seek to support or refute them, or work with them in any way that considers their truth value, their accuracy. I seek no "true" origin for them. Indeed, this text does not conceive of them as stable things that I may bring wholly to this conversation, and rather recognizes that with every citation, a sign, a set of signs, will be fragmented from its original context. This thesis is not about the ideas it cites, it is about the citation of those ideas, about possibilities that might exist in what we call the "experience" of those ideas as they are articulated in language, and thus conceived, as they are ever and always fragmented from anything original.

As a narrative inquiry into my experience of language, it matters that I inquire into the particular articulation of ideas that I have encountered through my life, even if those ideas are only shades of their first enunciations. And though I may seek fidelity with an idea by working hard to present it correctly, how often do we actually do this, or even have time to do so? We use textbooks to teach in many cases. Textbooks with snippets of "major" psychological theories, presented in more or less digested, altered, palpable (even understandable) form. How often do we trace every idea presented in secondary fashion back to the original source before we

work with it, recite it, apply it? Can we even do this? If I have learned of an idea from a textbook, it seems more apt to cite the textbook's author rather than the originator of the idea. And to the extent that this textbook ascribes the idea to another author is perhaps the extent that I may do so as well. For it is the text in the textbook which has presented itself in my reading, and so it is the textbook that has informed me, at least until the point where I seek the original text. And so, because I have been presented with many ideas from Psychology in such a digested form, it is the articulation of that digestion which cites and recites, is applied, used, reified, articulated by and through me and my experience. With regard to any inquiry into my experience of the language of "self", it is the history of that digested articulation which matters. The citations in this thesis therefore mark my own timeline of reading and experience of such language, and they remain fully vulnerable to the possibility that any idea articulated here which is ascribable to an original author more worthy of credit may, in fact, be very different from anything like the "original."

### Revisited, Remembered, Recited

There's a vague strangeness here.  
 Here in this place, hear  
 On this gravel road,  
 In the back of my head,  
 Where my vision thoughts rest,  
 My occipital lobe,  
 Drinking fast without choice  
 'cuz my eyes are just open,  
 'cuz I don't want to trip,  
 I am swallowing sights here  
 My citing like water  
 Once swallowed from Dixie cups  
 We drank from in innocence,  
 Our toothy impressions left,  
 Unseen gas rising up from  
 Our claims upon this place.

This moment here bitten,  
 My "I was here bite,"  
 Floats toxic up into  
 Blue bird's-eye-view skies.

I am walking up a gravel road, Anne, my girlfriend, beside me. We have just entered Loon Lake, a conference and retreat site in the middle of the University of British Columbia Forestry reserve located near Golden Ears National Park in BC. The site itself is situated on a small and steep peninsula surrounded by steep tree-lined hills and on the southern end of the small but deep lake after which it is named. It is a peaceful place. Quiet. Wind in the trees rustle whispers that caress my skin gracing me with the sense of sanctuary that can only be found in words like "nestle," or in horizons of evergreens breathing softly in the mist. The road we're walking up curls to the left and circles up and around one tier of the campground. Overlooking me from a height of fifteen or twenty feet is the balcony of the dining hall, and as we crunch quietly in the gravel, we rise to meet the hall's cheery smile.

There is a strangeness here.

We have completed a half-circle along the road and have risen to an equal level with the hall. The road straightens as it climbs still further to the next building nestled on the hill behind the hall. We walk. I do not feel anticipation. I do not feel any sort of advent bearing upon me as we climb. We are talking about this and that, slowly or quickly finding that familiarity we enjoy with each other. We haven't seen each other for a week. This is my second visit this summer. Last night on the phone, I had told her of my discovery that I had been at this camp ground long ago, when I was two. I had discovered this interesting fact from my father, who had called me just to say hello, last night as well, and now, as I write, here and now:

"She works at Loon Lake," I say to him.

"What? Really?"

"Ya, up by Golden Ears" I qualify. My dad seems somewhat surprised by something but I have no idea why – I've told him this before. At least, I think I have."

"You've been there before" he says.

"Huh?" A bit dumbfounded, "When?"

"When you were really young. That was where we did therapy back then. Loon Lake."

"What? That's not what I know – I do have a memory from when I was two or so of that first Haney, but that was what it was called: 'Haney.'"

"No, it was Loon Lake – we did it at Loon Lake."

"Seriously? I've never heard reference to Loon Lake – all I remember is Haney. Wait, no: I remember some mention of 'Naramata,' but that was before I was born. Then there was 'Haney.'"

"No, no, no," my dad says, "Haney is a place you travel through to get there. It's on the way, but we never did anything there. Loon Lake is past Haney."

This happens between my father and me. Sometimes, we just “miss.”

“I know that Loon Lake is not in Haney, but I remember that getaway as ‘Haney,’ like: people never referred to it as ‘Loon Lake’ that I can ever remember; it was always referred to as ‘Haney.’”

“No, Chris – Loon Lake is not in Haney.”

“*Yes, I know* – I understand that you were at Loon Lake. But I’ve only ever heard it referred to as ‘Haney.’ When people in my group, or in my workshops, commented upon this memory I have, they called it ‘Haney.’”

“Oh, oh, oh – I see. Okay. Yes. We definitely were near Haney, so maybe that’s why. But it was Loon Lake.”

We are connected again.

“Seriously...,” I continue, “Wow. That’s nuts – do you remember anything about it?”

“Ya, I remember it because the buildings were built with Cedar planks. Not small 2x4 wood, but not unfinished either. Big thick planks, finished. The dining hall I remember, it was gorgeous.”

“Oh wow, I think you might be right. The dining hall has these really thick pieces that hold up the roof. Do you remember the layout?”

“I think so – I remember there was a stage at the end. I used to play piano during the meal times. That’s actually how those concerts evolved at Pack Forest...” (Pack Forest was the next site for our therapy community’s retreats), “from people getting up and spontaneously playing music during mealtimes in the dining hall.”

“Hmmm... I don’t know if there’s a stage, though there’s definitely a place for one. Are you sure it’s the same one?”



“Well, it was really small – not a real stage...”

“Well, do you remember approaching the dining hall? Like, from the front, you can walk right into the dining area and you’ll see two files of bench tables, one on the left wall, one on the right, and repeating the length of the hall to the kitchen area up front.”

“Yes...”

“But you could also walk to the right of the dining area, outside, and enter the building by another door which you’d find closer to the back of the building. If you walked in that door, you’d enter a little hall with a bathroom at the end. Just before the bathroom, the hall opens onto the main dining hall on the right hand side, and the entrance to the kitchen area is right there.”

“Yes, I think that’s right – it was a long time ago.”

“Kay wait, I have some pictures I can send you. I’m not sure I have the whole hall, but...”

“Okay...”

I rummage through the pics I took two weeks ago during my first visit this summer. Hanging from the ceiling of the dining hall were these gorgeous paper crane mobiles. Anne had told me that everyone at the camp thought they were so beautiful and that she wasn’t sure what was going to happen to them after. So I decided to take some quick shots – digital cameras are nice because they allow you to capture the stills of your memory with the caprice that memory is often recorded with – instant, sudden, precarious, playful, traumatic – with no associated developing cost. You no longer have to develop your memories, you can simply take them.

As I locate the files on my hard drive and attach them to an email, I let my father know.

“Here, I’m sending you what I have. There’s no pics of the room, but the cedar planks on the roof are good, so let me know.”

“Okay – I’m not at my computer, but I’ll look when I check next.”

“Cool... That is so weird. I have one memory that... Oh god...”

Something is burgeoning.

Quiet.

Quiet.

And as I write this, I’m going to deliberately stretch this quiet moment out with a thought that comes to me now, one originating in this time and place rather than from within this moment I am remembering, but one that will be a part of that moment, perhaps, from this remembering point forward. I want to develop this memory in this quiet moment and say that:

It is worth it  
 To pause.  
 Quiet.  
 Suspend any self-conscious appreciation of this moment,  
 Any awareness that I am in this chair,  
 Suddenly silent,  
 Mouth slightly agape,  
 Stunned in wonder,  
 Stunned in something... something I want to call sadness, or nostalgia, or delight  
 Or so many things,  
 And it is worth it  
 Not to.

For they then come, whatever those things are.  
 They come, and are present.  
 And I *know* well beyond any definition of knowledge  
 The *sense* of my remembering.  
 I find the *sense*, perhaps, of what is remembered.  
 I am there,  
 And here,  
 Now,  
 Only in the quiet of this moment.

Quiet.

Quiet.

“Oh my god,” quietly, “I know where that memory is. I know where I was, when I was two.”

“Wow,” my dad says, “neat Chris.”

“Ya...” I say, voice trailing off, and only now stretching out beyond this immersed remembrance, yearning to, yearning not to. Streeetch. Yeeeeearn....

“God, that’s *weird*,” I qualify.

Snap! Captured in a word. Lost.

“I’m sorry, Chris, are you okay?”

“Ya, I’m alright – it’s just weird to know exactly where that memory is from, in real life, to have been there, even though the memory itself carries no notion of any known location. But I’m sure I was walking there two weeks ago.”

“Wow.”

“Ya. God. So it was Loon Lake – Haney, I mean.”

“Yes it was.”

Anne and I climb the straight part of that road to the staff house, the building in the hill behind the dining hall. I stand at the place where the road comes level with the walkway to the entrance of this building which sits about thirty feet to the left of the road. In front of it, a field covers the flat surface of the hill until the point where it descends to the dining hall. This field circumscribes the building, tapering to a thin 15 foot strip behind it. There is a fence of wooden posts around the field stretching from the back of the building to the point where I now stand by the cement walkway.

I say nothing, and Anne and I head into the building to see what’s going on inside. I am feeling something, but its not something like a feeling so much as whatever happens before a

feeling that lets you know that a feeling's coming, only no feeling is coming. Instead, the remembrance rests upon my skin, absorbs into my body, my muscles. I am walking this moment now as I walk- this moment when it happened 29 years ago. This site is *citing*.

There is no strangeness here.

I was here.

"Anne," I say, "I was here 30 years ago."

"Really?" she says. Well no, she doesn't say that – she just looked at me, ready. But it's funny how we need truth to present itself *really*.

"Ya: Here, come with me." I take her hand. We walk back out the cement walkway to where it meets the gravel road. "When I was two, I sat right here. I sat looking at the grass in front of me where this walkway is now, only, back then, I don't think there was a walkway. And the grass was tall grass, though I guess if I was two years old, most grass was tall grass. I sat here – I had left. Or I guess my mom had taken me out. Or someone. But I know I was outside because I didn't want to be inside. I know that because that is why I looked back at the building I had just come from. I looked back, was looking back. That building. That one, right there. 30 years ago."

Quiet.

I turn myself around a few times, just looking. I have two memories of that/this place, and now I know that they are from the same few minutes, for the other is of the inside of the building, where it was dark, only there were big windows, and I had shelter from the sun and the heat. It is absolutely incredible to me that the most peaceful things for me, as an adult, have consistently been the things found in these two memories. Trees, wind, quiet, enclosure, natural light in dark buildings, shade from the sun. They are all right here.

My two memories touch fingers, hold.  
 And I am here now, remembering.  
 I was here.

“That fence was not there either,” I say, “I have a memory of logs, or rocks, but I think it was logs, lining the edge of this part of the field. I wonder if that’s how it was?”

A day later we are back inside the building. I am photographing both the interior and exterior from vantage points that I have (I now understand) remembered for almost thirty years as well as ones that I think my dad may remember from his descriptions of the other buildings. I will not describe those details for you here, but I will mention that he remembered a big stone fireplace, and this dark airy building has a big stone fireplace. And perhaps I just described one of those details after all. Here are more:

“It would have to be big,” he had said that day on the phone,” because that’s where we did all the psychodramas and abreactives and that kind of thing.”

As I look around the inside of this building, I’m not sure it could house 100 people in a circle. But it is definitely the kind of room that we would have done psychodramas in. At least, from the way I remember the rooms in which I would come to participate in such things, I believe it could be. As I photograph, I notice other details. The big windows, the way the room looks in natural light, all these things seeming to solidify into some congruence within me, though I would never describe the process that way, at least, not again. And one detail to finish this remembered remembrance:

On the wall sits a picture. It is a picture of this building in some past time. It is black and white. There is no cement walkway. There are logs lining the edge of the field. And tall grass.

There is a vague strangeness here.  
 I am here,  
 Was here,  
 Ever and again.

## Here and Now

I am sitting here thinking of sitting in a “here” that is not here, but there, and not now, though I may not necessarily describe it as such, and would rather just stick to “not here” and mean both time and space. Quantum tells us that time and space may be more complex than what we learned in Physics 12. Did you take physics 12? I wonder why I said “we” back there, for as surely as I have done so, I was also most definitely trying to avoid speaking for any “you”-s out there. I learned, in physics 12, that time and space were two dimensions. And that, though one could appreciate a differing rate of change of time at different relative speeds, one could most certainly not go “back” to any time.

I learned this “in” physics 12, which is an interesting construction given that when we use “in” we are often referring to being “in” something, and how can we be “in” Physics 12 when thinking of it as a course of education “in” the past? For as I have just shared, we cannot go back “in” the past. And there I go again with the “we.” What are we “in” when we speak of the past? What were “we” “in” then? What are “we” “in” now? Am I even “in” anything, or rather, am I “at” it? Was I “at” class while in Physics 12? Was I “in” class because I was “in” Physics 12? And if so, was I “at” anything? Can I be both “in” class and “at” class, or if I am “in” class must I be “at” something else? Can you be “at” something?

I am currently at the process of writing.

I am Hard at it.

I’m at it in a here and now, but one taking place at or in Tsawwassen. And it is hard to be at Tsawwassen, which is the place where I am right now, as much as I am actually in my apartment. I can go there, if I want. I can get in my car, turn on the ignition, put on my Stone Temple Pilots CD, cruise the freeway in the fast lane, hit that raspy high note when Scott Whelan

sings: "All of these things I said to you," (Stone Temple Pilots, 1994, *Interstate Love Song*) and when we both sing "with naked feet, stabbing thoughts and I become you..."

"Oh oh...

I beg for you...

Oh oh...

You know I beg for you." (Stone Temple Pilots, 1994, *Still Remains*)

I can get there from here. With or without a car. And what is the difference? What is it for you that you see me here, see me on that highway, hear me now from this keyboard, see me there cross-legged on those dirty white painted metal seats with the smell of tar and exhaust mingling with the salty smell of the sea and the strange pungency of rotting seaweed? How is it that it is for you? How am I for you right now? I most assuredly am, even as I type these letters. And as I sit here, on this white metal seat, watching gulls and thinking of the black tar blood spilled on those old logs jutting from the sea like the ribs of some long dead mother mammoth, her progeny to walk the land even as she rests in the depths of a watery memoir, even as I sit here, wherever I happen to sit, as I write these words, this place happens here, and has happened. Or maybe it is because at this place, at some time

Some Thing Happened.

We were ferried away to Saltspring Island. It happened more than once, though perhaps not too often. A bunch of us would pile into a group of vehicles, usually vans lined with foamies on which we could ride in groups, singing, "Alice the Camel had 9 humps." Go Alice go. I never wanted to go. I often asked my parents if ferries could sink. "Ferries don't sink, Chris." Too bad. We would go for weekends away to enjoy the peace of Saltspring's nature, to surround ourselves in it so that we might better get in touch with our "selves," better feel the authenticity of being human, of a human being, one be-ing. Always, the ferries that would take us there left from Tsawwassen, and it is here in which I remember, at which I write remembering.

And yet it was *not* this place exactly. The white bars are now dirtier, the ferry line up is longer, the paint on the concrete where you are supposed to park is grimmer, and the parkade now takes credit cards. The Queen of Saanich is graying now (her eyes, eye mean), greyer with wisdom as she gazes at me, harbouring lingering worries about how she moves a little too slowly now, about these “Fast Ferry” things. This is not the same place. Or rather, it is not the same time because things have

Happened.

But I am in this place, while at this writing, and if in it and not at it where exactly am I? And as you read, understand that I have written this a while ago, perhaps long ago – maybe go check the copyright notice – how recent is my “at” of this writing? Am I now “in” your past? How close are you to me? As you read and cite these words, as they float in your head, I want to call Derrida (1991) and ask him just what has been cited here as you have sighted these letters which exist, despite their phenomenological link to some “I” (me or myself, take your pick, you), still exist, and where am I except in this hereby that I have hereby just left? No, this place you are at in these letters is right now, you are at it, in this writing, at this ferry dock, and I am at this ferry dock, at this writing, and at the place where long ago

Some Thing Happened.  
As we happen to be thinking about now,  
As we happen to be now,  
As we happen  
Now.

Much like you may fold this paper, we have collapsed one side to the other and  
fragmented places in a colossal contact across time and space.

And magically here you are.  
Here I am.  
And hear we are  
At this:



## Ferry

Amidst the scream of seagulls,  
The butter glare of morning sun  
Reflected off the big white ferry,  
Its playground blue,  
Its lip red stripes,  
The smell of smog  
And people smiling  
(You know that smell,  
Smiling and sunglassing).

All the kids screech like the  
Bickering seagulls, their parents  
A giggle, believing the sunshine in  
"Everything's fine,"  
While the seagulls a-hover,  
Like vultures to dinner,  
Alert for the chance  
Bit of garbage or better  
All listen, and glisten  
With ferry's slick breath.

I know what they sense  
For I sense it as well.

And I smell the black  
Clinging memories below us:  
The tar on the pilings,  
The carbon monoxide,  
The screams of the seagulls,  
Their shit on the wood.  
That's my blood on those pilings  
My blood on those pilings,  
White vultures are smiling,  
And I smell  
My blood.

### **“I” (From Derrida to Butler)**

While Derrida's marks may function despite (in spite of?) intent, it is hard to dismiss intent altogether simply because language doesn't need it. Whence this “I” behind words?

For Derrida (1991), the signature is the sign that bears witness to the “I.” It implies the “hereby” in that an “I” was here, an “I” that maps to a particular signature on a page, ever citing itself, “I,” within the moment in which that signature was signed, or within whatever moment someone decides to read that signature, so long as that signature is legible.

By definition, a written signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer. But, it will be said, it also marks and retains his having-been-present in a past now, which will remain a future now, and therefore in a now in general, in the transcendental form of nowness (*maintenance*). This general *maintenance* is somehow inscribed, stapled to the present punctuality, always evident and always singular, in the form of the signature. This is the enigmatic originality of every paraph. For the attachment to the source to occur, the absolute singularity of an event of the signature and of a form of the signature must be retained: the pure reproducibility of a pure event. Is there some such thing?.... Are there signatures? Yes, of course, every day. The effects of signature are the most ordinary thing in the world. The condition of possibility for these effects is simultaneously, once again, the condition of their impossibility, of the impossibility of their rigorous purity. (p. 107)

Because signs *must* break from context to work, and because, in so doing, signs echo past contexts, collapsing time, as it were, burgeoning with their semantic horizon even as they imply everything that they are not, signatures then, as signs that bespeak an “I,” cite that “I” and collapse across moments when that “I” was hereby, at the same time breaking that “I” from its

previous contexts, pulling it into the ever-now and fragmenting it into “I”-s that were, are, will be, as well as implying all that is not “I.”

(Derrida, 1991, p. 109).

My signature, in bringing an “I” into the now, in citing the “I” that maps to me, simultaneously attests to that “I”’s own discontinuity. For as I signed the page up there, I actually didn’t – that’s a print you see, a copy, a duplication, a citation, a claim evidenced in part by that signature’s presence on some previous page in this very document. In terms of understanding the “I” as something that inheres in something else, a continuous truth, the signature’s necessary discontinuity attests to the “I”’s own falseness: I am not here, but “I” is (as my signature), and so I am hereby. Even now I am hereby, for who is this “I” whose voice you are reading? I am most definitely not wherever you are now, though I may always be in that “now,” that “transcendental form of nowness” (p. 107). The “I” does not continue, it only ever emerges.

So why the “I?” What need? In *Demeure*, Derrida (2000) provides a possibility with his discussion of testimony:

When a testifying witness, whether or not he is explicitly under oath, without being able or obligated to prove anything, appeals to the faith of the other by engaging himself to tell the truth – no judge will accept that he should shirk his responsibility ironically by declaring or insinuating: what I am telling you here retains the status of a literary fiction. And yet, if the testimonial is by law irreducible to the fictional, there is not testimony that does not structurally imply in itself the possibility of fiction, simulacra, dissimulation, lie, and perjury.... In order to remain testimony, it must therefore allow itself to be haunted.

It must allow itself to be parasitized by precisely what it excludes from its inner depths, the *possibility*, at least, of literature.... It is a chance and a threat... law and non-law, truth and non-truth, veracity and lie, faithfulness and perjury. (p. 29)

Testimony *must* be haunted by what it is not (falseness) in order to be testimony. Truth *must* imply everything that it is not in order to remain truth (in both the sense of the word [here a grapheme] “truth,” and in the case of anything spoken that is designated as truth, e.g. testimony). And this is incredibly important for a discussion of the “I”, for if I claim testimony, and my testimony, by virtue of being claimed, implies that I might be lying and therefore obviously am not, *who* bears witness to whether or not I am lying? No *other* may bear witness to this, for if they did, what I say would no longer be testimony – its veracity would be determinable outside of simply being spoken:

I can only testify, in the strict sense of the word, from the instant when no one can, in my place, testify to what I do. What I testify to is, at that very instant, my secret: it remains reserved for me. I must be able to keep secret precisely what I testify to; it is the condition of the testimony in a strict sense, and this is why one will never be able to demonstrate, in the sense of a theoretical proof or a determinate judgment, that a perjury or lie has in fact taken place. Even admission will not be enough. (p. 30)

In speaking testimony, in signing an instant as with words that are truthful, something bespeaks a *hereby* whereby that which is spoken *becomes* truth, a witness that can only be born in secret, borne in secrecy. In a sense, we have just witnessed the birth of an inner eye (or perhaps that’s an “I”?). I can only give testimony if I am accorded the reflexivity to determine that what I say is true, or to carry, to bear, the possibility that it is not, and I may not do anything *but* determine that what I say is true simply because, as Derrida mentions, nobody can ever determine that I am

lying but me. “I” have been brought to life through the phenomenon of *speaking truth*, or more accurately, for the express purpose of testifying truth *for others*. The “I” has been brought to bear on a life by, and for, others.

For me, this is a powerful idea. It becomes even more powerful when you consider the innocuous statement Derrida provides earlier in the text about dates: “If I insist on these dates, and I often will, it is to recall what a date, *that is, the event of a signature*, inscribes in the relation between fiction and testimony” (p. 20, italics added). Dates are signatures. They are the testimony of time, the “hereby” of time. Truth does not necessarily require an “I” in order to be present: time can sign signatures, and events in this universe unfold without my “I”, without me signing any words. I do not need to be here, nor to have been here. Time was here. This happened.

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Is it any wonder that writing has so much power? So, if time is all that is needed for testimony, whence the “I”?

The “I” born of testimony might be specific to testimony born of a human being, a speaking body. But witness here the power of preposition: had I spoken that last sentence instead of writing it, you might here (sorry, “hear”) the phonological homonym of “born,” namely; “borne.” If that were to occur, the preposition “of” requires changing to “by,” or “on,” relocating the origin of my truthfulness from inner to outer (or at least, to surface). What happens then? What happens when truth does not inhere *in* a body? Or rather, what if it doesn’t do so necessarily? Indeed, if you are going to *feel* your sense of who you are, *where* do you feel it? What preposition do we need here? Do I feel myself on/in/with/as my (a) body? If I, my “I”,

is brought to life *for* others, how does that bringing occur? How is an “I” brought *to* a life, a body? Such is the some of the thought Judith Butler (2004) provides in *Undoing Gender*:

It becomes a question for ethics [what makes for a livable world], I think, not only when we ask the personal question, what makes my own life bearable, but when we ask, from a position of power, and from the point of view of distributive justice, what makes, or ought to make, the lives of others bearable? Somewhere in the answer we find ourselves not only committed to a certain view of what life is, and what it should be, but also of what constitutes the human, the distinctively human life, and what does not.... it is necessary to ask both the question of life and the question of the human, and not to let them fully collapse into one another. (p. 17)

Butler goes on to locate the notion of *autonomy* as something far more socially complex, one that is less an inherent quality and more something that emerges:

The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and to violence. The body can be the agency and instrument of all these as well, or the site where “doing” and “being done to” become equivocal. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, bearing their imprint, formed within the crucible of social life, the body is only later, and with some uncertainty, that to which I lay claim as my own... if I build a notion of “autonomy” on the basis of the denial of this sphere..., then do I precisely deny the social and political conditions of my embodiment in the name of autonomy? (p. 21)

The primary condition for asserting any notion of autonomy in body, for Butler, is precisely the way in which bodies are given over to each other. And this is the basis for her gorgeous and haunting claim, "Let's face it. We're undone by each other" (p.19). Every autonomous body implies every other body upon which that notion of autonomy must, *must*, rest, reside, remain. "One" body implies and makes present every other, a description that resonates nicely with Derrida's notions about signs. Butler asserts that "when we say 'we' we do nothing more than designate this [the distinction between other and self] as very problematic" (p. 20). As autonomous beings, we undo each other by virtue of implying the very vulnerability and connection that ever *lets* us claim autonomy. Our autonomy implies our non-autonomy. Our bodies then, in their vulnerability to touch and to violence, imply the bodies of others, bear our "I"'s (eyes?) *for* others.

And here we have a problem. For the possessive connotes the reflexive. When we say "our bodies," or "our autonomy," for what or from where are we speaking? What makes that possessive claim? Is this a hint of humanistic phenomenology? No, if one is careful, one comes across another gem of complication: "...when we speak about *my* sexuality or *my* gender... we mean something complicated by it. Neither of these is precisely a possession, but both are to be understood as *modes of being dispossessed*." (p. 19). And so, in asserting possessive claim over our bodies, we are, in fact, being dispossessed of them precisely because that claim makes us vulnerable to the other, in fact becomes the basis for which the other is defined, and thus our possession of body is very much *for* the other, that body *for* the other's body, the other's autonomy. If there is a possessor here, it comprises, or is complicated by, every *other*.

So if autonomy, one-hood, does not map immediately or necessarily to one body, what happens to the words "someone" and "somebody"? Their existence as synonyms betrays some

process whereby such a grafting (one-hood to body) does occur, or should occur, or at least that we'd like to think of ourselves this way. How does one-hood come to body? Perhaps it does so under the threat of what might take place were it not to?

There is a more general conception of the human at work here, one in which we are, from the start, given over to the other, one in which we are, from the start, even prior to individuation itself, and by virtue of our embodiment, given over to an other: this makes us vulnerable to violence, but also to another range of touch, a range that includes the eradication of our being at one end, and the physical support for our lives at the other. We cannot endeavor to "rectify" this situation. And we cannot recover the source of this vulnerability, for it precedes the formation of the "I". (p. 23)

Butler's distinction between life and the human is echoed here: "physical support" indicates the question of life (biological), and "lives" is the question of the human, further clarifying a model in which "lives" happen *upon* bodies at one end of this spectrum, and at the other, *beings* are eradicated. Her question about what makes lives bearable now carries a tone over and above "tolerable," and closer to the sense of *to bear*, that is, to carry. The implication set up here is that as a life becomes less bearable upon a body, then (a) being is eradicated. Her question "what makes lives bearable" could very well be the question of what makes lives, what makes 'the human' bearable *on* a body? What human lives get to be borne? Or is that "born"? What lives get to be "*conceived as persons*"? (Butler, 2004, p. 32) The simile is potent. Butler's assertion that there is a more "general conception of the human at work here" begs to be folded over onto itself as a comment upon how humans are conceived, in both the natal and intellectual sense of that word. Bodies are born, and then bear humans. Bodies are conceived, and then conceived "*as*" humans, humans borne upon those bodies. A body is at once a simile for the human, and



the bearer of that simile. But if these questions of “bearable” and “tolerable” highlight a simile of the human, perhaps it is time to identify another clause that haunts them, namely: “for whom?” The human that is bearable upon a physical body is not just bearable for that body, but for every other human implied by its existence. And so Butler highlights how political this dynamic is: by deriving from a social process, any humans who become less tolerable to others are endangered by the very vulnerability upon which they, as a human “being,” emerge, the same vulnerability that opens them to the threat of eradication, of violence.

Conceptually speaking, Butler’s body is similar to Derrida’s testifying witness. As a body bears the human for others, the witness bears the “I” for others. Given that Butler’s borne human somehow implies other borne humans, can we graft Derrida to Butler to forward the possibility that a body bearing the human somehow *testifies*, somehow signals a truth of something? Could Butler’s human, as a sort of testimony, infuse a kind of truth in the human, or of what human is bearable, through its own reification? Does a body who speaks from the “I” somehow testify to the truth of the human it bears? I think so. It is not that a body carries an inherent truth of subjectivity, and it is not that in engaging in a discourse of the subjective “I” that we testify on behalf of its inherent truthfulness, but rather that the “I” is a *precondition* for, and an indicator of, testifying to the truth of the human on a body (whatever that truth may be) – it is at once the signal that the life one lives has been legitimized as livable, and at the same time the thing that grants that legitimacy by virtue of the secret reflexivity that Derrida describes. And so, what might ring of the humanistic phenomenological in Butler’s writing may actually be a kind of political intervention. If the “I” is not just a sign of legitimization, but also precondition for it, then perhaps *adopting* the “I” enacts a kind of shake up for what, in the reproducibility of

the human, ends up reifying that “I” as legitimate on a particular body. Butler acknowledges that the contestation of what gets to be “human” can occur at the “I”:

If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility. As a result, the “I” that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them but also endeavors to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them. This is not easy, because the “I” becomes, to a certain extent unknowable, threatened with unviability, with becoming undone altogether...There is a certain departure from the human that takes place in order to start the process of remaking the human. I may feel that without some recognizability I cannot live. But I may also feel that the terms by which I am recognized make life unlivable. (p. 3)

The human I bear, here, at this writing, is one not nearly so contested. I am straight, male, not nearly so affluent that I don’t worry about my needs, but with a social network that means I do not have to live on the street. But I think the human I bear, even this one that is sanctioned, safe, may indeed bespeak something insidious. My experience of “self” has led me to question just what kind of human I have on this body, and why this body must have something like identity, or “self”, within it. And so I will speak from my “I” to inquire of this human, speak from experience, and about, around, my experience of my “self”, and “self”, itself. In so doing, I wish to destabilize it – adopt my I, my reflexive eye, I, and eye my “self”, for I believe this “self”, is exactly that, a languaged thing, the truth of which I have (my “I” has) come to testify. It behooves me to be responsible and come to know just what truth I am (is) telling. Indeed, perhaps it’s time I come to tell a darker truth of “self”.

*In my autobiographical poems,  
I am learning how to live with wellness in the world.  
I am learning that I bear the traces  
of everybody I have known  
and many I have not known,  
sacred connections to be acknowledged.*

- Carl Leggo (2003, p. 136)

**I watched a man die once.**



I think that's how it feels. Not so much empty as like something's missing, something I need(s) to be there. Maybe this is what Butler (2004) means when she writes:

I think instead that one mourns when one accepts the fact that the loss one undergoes will be one that changes you, changes you possibly forever, and that mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation the full result of which you cannot know in advance. So there is losing, and there is the transformative effect of loss, and the latter cannot be charted or planned.... It may seem that one is undergoing something temporary, but it could be that in this experience something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that those ties constitutes a sense of self, compose who we are, and that when we lose them, we lose our composure in some fundamental sense: we do not know who we are or what to do. Many people think that grief is privatizing, that it returns us to a solitary situation, but I think it exposes the constitutive sociality of the self, a basis for thinking a political community of a complex order. (p. 18)

What do I do with this, this empty space? This place? Is it just me here?

*me*

Where have I gone? Who am I, reading this? I am all alone. Am I even here? Was I ever here to begin with?

Lucky for me, the man came back to life. Lucky *for me*. Not because I knew this man. Or, rather, I did know him, but I am not lucky because of that, for I did not know him well. And what does that mean? To know *well*. Can I know *badly*? And in doing this, in *knowing*, do I *do* something to *what* or *who* I know? Did I do something to this man because I did not know him well? Or well enough? Did we all do it? Did we all know him badly, know him unwell? All of us, sitting there in that circle, drugged up on sodium amytal and watching the CPR in front of us, shouting encouragement, cat-calling ridicule to instigate this man's spirit, his soul, his "Self", his whatever it is that is *his* in that body, but definitely *in* that body, and currently wondering if it should leave that body, and oh, how that smacks of a Heaven led life, or was that Heavy Lea(d-ed)?

He was Heaven-led,  
 Almost dead,  
 And we the hands  
 Clapping flapping  
 Lips of encouragement  
 Paying that service very much  
 Forward  
 In the hope, perhaps  
 That his journey did something for us.  
 No, each of us,  
 Or someone like us,  
 I hope someone likes me.  
 Pay it  
 For – word.

It was another drug-induced (enhanced, enraptured) therapy weekend. I was sixteen or seventeen years old. There were a few of us tripping on sodium amytal, and a few "helpers" who were not, among the latter was the psychiatrist who supervised all of these activities. I know from my abnormal psychology textbook that sodium amytal was sometimes used in psychiatric therapy (Comer, 2004. p. 228). But of course, I could not tell you for sure what we took because I have never found nor heard of any records. We were told that the drug would disengage our

defensive barriers and would thereby grant an intimate felt experience of true self, true feelings, authentic self, the centre of the onion – take your pick of the idiom, I’m sure you know what I mean.

Sometime during the afternoon, one member of the group began to choke in his chair. His eyes rolled back, his body contorted, his tongue lolled out slightly. Next, he was on the ground and two of the group members had sprung into action. For the rest of us, it was obvious, *obvious*, that there was something spiritual going on here.

“You can do it!”

“Don’t give in!”

“Fight, don’t give in to the darkness!”

“Come on, enough with the drama!”

“You are stronger than this – I *know* this!”

“I know you!”

Is that knowing someone?

Is that knowing someone well?

We did not know him well enough, perhaps, but we did know him enough that he came back to life. And so we knew him *for* ourselves. Rather, for our “Selves”, that he was the example of the fight we fought, the striving, the ever actualizing moment that was living within us in each passing second, amplified on that precarious existential cliff upon which he stood slipping, scrabbling, tempted perhaps to flip the bird to whatever Heaven happened to be holding in its arms for him.

Whatever. Or, at least, ever something – the something he had been up to this point was still important for us, import-able for us. We needed him, needed him still, needed him to remain so that we could ever strive to be our “Selves” too. Is my life vicarious? Were we living through his dying struggle? Is *through* even the right word?



I remember two sets of hands working that body hard. One pumping the chest, one keeping the airway open. They worked in tandem. One, I know, was as drugged-up as I was. They were both “qualified” – you could have asked for some paper to prove it, and they both would have been able to show you the right piece. Indeed, Hippocrates would probably have approved, at least insofar as this was the last intervening moment. Push, pump, blow, prop, “come on, man – don’t give in!”

Hands on chest, hands on neck, hands *on* that body pumping it, one breath into the other, do the other, pushing it to life, pressing down upon it so that it would be alive, there on the ground, not dead, bearing for its baring, our baring. We needed that guy, that body, to keep breathing, keep pumping. An “In order” haunts this sentence. And *through* is the wrong word.

This man came back to life, hands upon his body, a body burdened again by that life, and very much for us. My memory, this. My footprint. And I feel the soul of it on this man’s chest. Living, that day, very much that I too may live

*On*

( - w w H a o I r r M d d )

It took me about ten years to understand that set of moments, to understand that I once witnessed a man having a heart attack. I remember, an hour after the incident, and still in my trippy state, saying something about how I had felt his struggle, that I had been a part of it. And I remember feeling this so intimately that I had cried for the beauty of having touched *my* “true self,” *my* “spirit”. We were all convinced that something important had just happened. All of us.

It took me ten years to rethink this.

Nobody called an ambulance.

### Foucault's *Agonism* and Derrida's "We"

So the "I" may emerge to testify truth. But is this the "I" we all know and love (or hate)? Is this the intimate thing I feel when I say things like "I love hockey," or "I *am* a writer," etc.? How is it that the "I" seems to be *in* us even if, as we consider Butler and Derrida, it might be *on* us? And is the "I" of Derrida necessarily an experiential "I"? Does the experiential "I" signify the experiential "self," or the experience of Butler's *human* on a body? How do we link the languaged "I" of Derrida to the body? Foucault (2000) may provide a possibility with his concept of *power relations* (p. 339).

In *The Subject and Power*, Foucault (2000) is not interested in what power is so much as "what happens" (p. 336)? As such, he endeavors to illustrate how power is less a thing wielded than it is something that manifests in relation. Power is:

...a set of actions on possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; it releases or contrives, makes more probable or less; in the extreme, it constrains or forbids absolutely, but it is always a way of acting upon one or more acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions. (p. 341)

Foucault goes on to describe the power relation with his neologism *agonism*:

At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom. Rather than speaking of an essential antagonism, it would be better to speak of an "agonism" – of a relationship that is at the same time mutual incitement and struggle; less of a face-to-face confrontation that paralyzes both sides than a permanent provocation. (p. 342)

For Foucault, power is not strictly opposed to freedom so much as freedom must be presupposed for power to emerge. The two are in “permanent provocation,” mutually dependent on the relation they share, a relation Foucault conceives as rather central to society:

For to say that there cannot be a society without power relations is not to say...that power, in any event, constitutes an inescapable fatality... Instead, I would say that the analysis, elaboration, and bringing into question of power relations and the “agonism” between power relations and the intransitivity of freedom is an increasingly political task – even, the political task that is inherent in *all social existence*. (p. 343, italics added)

So, social existence cannot help but bring into question the agonism of power relations – it is there the instant we are more than one, the instant we are social. It turns out that the word *agony* shares a common root with *agonism*, namely: *aGon* (*Agon*, n.d.; *Agony*, n.d.; ). So *agonism* echoes of agony and hints of pain (or perhaps pleasure?) at the centre of social existence. With *agonism*, Foucault provides a poetic that grants us a sort of sore access to the power relations manifesting between us.

Does Butler’s question of the human, and does Derrida’s secrecy of testimony rest in an agonism of some kind? In *Demeure*, Derrida (2000) addresses the question of *we*, the question of the speaking relationship:

I can only say I am speaking French if it is assumed, as soon as I speak, this instant, in this very instant, that someone here, now, at least someone is able to understand this language that I call and is called French, and is able to form from the outset a *we* with the one who is speaking here this instant, with me, consequently. Thus: we are immediately more than one, as soon as *I* or an *I* speaks, of course, but in any case from the instant I am speaking French and say that I am speaking French.... Even if—hypothetically—no one

here this instant spoke French, no one but me, well even then, my speech act in French would nonetheless continue to assume someone, however indeterminate or distant he might be, someone who could understand what I am saying and who would form a *we* with me, someone who commits himself to forming a *we* with me—even if I were alone in speaking French here or even if I were simply speaking alone. This “we” without which there would be no testimony, this indeterminate “we” does not necessarily presuppose any agreement with what I am saying, any sympathy, any community, any consensus of any kind, except a minimal way of being, let us say, of an understanding with the other, with me here in the language, the instant it is being spoken... (p. 34)

One might be tempted to say that Derrida describes two “I”s coming to form a “we,” but if the “we” is something “without which there would be no testimony,” then it must exist before testimony. Testimony is where the “I” emerges, so it is the “I” that requires the “we”: We are *us* before we have “I”s (or is that eyes?). And now, as *us*, with respect to Butler’s human, suddenly we are speaking with each other, have “I”-s to testify, bear humans for each other, and thereby emerge as humans in an agony of relation. Foucault’s *agonism* poeticizes this place in which the testimony of the human stretches taut across an agony of “us,” taut across a communicative relationship, one strikingly similar to the interplay of power and freedom, perhaps even, an example of it.

**Bias**

I want to begin  
Deconstructing my "self,"  
To acknowledge that my part,  
"For my part"  
For yours,  
A beginning, it is:  
All it ever could be.  
All there ever might be  
Is this moment,  
Our "self"-s,  
You and me,  
Or whoever you may  
(be permitted to)  
be, ever  
(by)Us.  
Of course, I am  
By-us(-ed).

## Small i

I want to challenge  
 The discourse, to course  
 My way through all this language,  
 "Dis-" cover the senses,  
 Knee-jerky reflexes  
 Of one word,  
 Consisting in one letter,  
 Namely (and often so coupled with names):

I.

And I will engage  
 With Lynn Fels' (1999) poetic  
 Adoption,  
 And admit that, in fact,  
 I  
 Has two letters, two graphemes,  
 One a bit smaller  
 And, according to Fels, less distinct, (p. 5)  
 Perhaps not namely, though I will name:

i.

I like i because there's that little  
 Dot like an  
 Eye  
 Ball on top of that smaller line,  
 One perhaps indicating  
 The passing of time.  
 And perhaps it's not linear  
 But if based on mine, it is  
 Definitely so,  
 In that there's a flow  
 And  
 A small point that indicates  
 View,  
 And eyes do.  
 i view not from this point,  
 rather, am simply at it:  
 i am  
 Here,  
 And, in here, i am  
 Feeling so small.

## I, My Self

Why does “I” require a “self”? And if I am an “I”, must I then have a “self” that is mine, myself, my “self”? In *The laws of the living language*, John Wulsin (n.d.) writes of “myself” for the parents of children in a Waldorf school in Louisville, imploring increased attention to the language of our children:

The mystery of myself is that it absolutely cannot exist without I. Tom, Josh, Sarah, and myself can not go to an important conference, be on an important committee, join a power breakfast. Oh, no. Myself can do absolutely nothing.... Only I can do, can be. You can't, and they can't, love myself, bring myself. Oh, no. Myself is almost like the shadow of I... Just as I is the name only the individual can call himself or herself, so only I can refer to myself, can transform myself. To say that Josh, Sarah, and myself are on the committee reflects subtle, unconscious self-absorption, a grammatical, reflexive equivalent of muscle-flexing.... Myself, reflexive, is exclusively either the appositive (I, myself, will...), or the object of the subject (I trust myself). No myself in a sentence without I. (p. 27)

“Myself” requires I, indicating either the appositive (highlighting the subject position), or the object of the subject. “-self” (as a morpheme) may thus indicate subject position, while “myself” may indicate 1<sup>st</sup> person subject position or reflexivity. But does “self” alone do this? Does “myself” do this without the “I” of which it speaks? What do these words do? Why are they here?

As the reflexive, “myself” is, perhaps, the objectification of my subjective point of view from my own point of view (to the extent that I am employing “myself” myself, though could anyone else do so?). It is a distancing: the enactment of an ability to perhaps see my point of

view as another point of view from the hypothetical point of view of another. Or is it *for* another? Do I see myself, for you? And if so, what am I viewing? Is it a “self”? Is it my “I”? Can I even view my “I” objectively if I am doing so by virtue of uttering something, by speaking already from it?: “I view myself.” Is the reflexive “myself” necessarily, as the object of the subject (an objectification then), able to stand alone as an object only thereby allowing me, from the “I,” to reflexively see it as separate? What am I looking at when I view(s) “myself”? Is it different from what it indicates now, namely: “me” (from the point of view of another) or “I” (from this, my own point of view)? Does “myself” stand by *it*-self?

I don’t think so. At least, I do not believe it *must* necessarily do so – such an ability bespeaks a split between the speaking “I” and that which it maps to in the objective “me.” Wulsin says it clearly: “[myself] absolutely cannot exist without I” (p. 27). For to do so, “myself” becomes more like “me,” a word which can exist without “I”, in fact, almost precludes it. You do not here (sorry, “hear”): “I see me,” because the “I” and the “me” are mutually exclusive indicators in that phrase. “Me” is the object of the action of a subject that is *not* “I,” while “I” is the subject. “Me” stands alone. I think that when “myself” stands without “I,” it acts much like “me.” And it is possible to see why if you consider the homonymic utterance of “myself,” namely “my self.” Much like “my car,” or “my dog,” or “my body,” “my self” acts like “me” in that it is an object that is not “I”, though it is possessed *by* it. So in the reflexive statement, “I \_\_\_\_ myself,” there is no “self” to speak of unless what one is speaking about is no longer “I,” and is rather something “I” owns.

What happens in the reflexive moment that begets the owned “self”? Does this bespeak a kind of assurance, some need for something to exist in the point of view one has just objectified but in which one necessarily still remains? In such a moment, “self” is like a proxy



“I,” bespeaking some sort of weird separation, perhaps sort of reassuring that, despite this split, there is something back there to indicate that one still exists. When the “I” does speak of its own(ed) “self,” it becomes objectified to itself (*as well as* for the other) in its apparently reflexive move, perhaps making it real to itself in an owned objectification even while it is somehow displaced, an objectification that perhaps reassures it that it exists in its apparent reflexivity, perhaps making itself more tangible in the objectification and thereby affording it some sort of increased control of itself, its “self”, within that agony of *us*.

So what is “self” but an *ownable* I? “Myself” is not “my self.” If it were, one would hope that it would be written that way – as two words. But as speech, “myself” and “my self” are harder to discern. And if we bring Derrida to bear, perhaps their homonymic resonance is less an accident than something necessary about language: do “myself” and “my self” cite each other? Do they wrap around each other, fragmenting the “I”’s point of view in some reflexive embrace, wringing and clinging to myself as my “self,” a vaguely distressing clutch, crutch, haunted by some fear of the black nothing I may constantly emerge from?

*“It can be awful lonely in the Black”*

- Kaleigh (Whedon, 2002, *Firefly*).

“Myself”,

as “my self”,

is mine, my own,

“...my *precious*

... my birthday-present!

... that’s what we wants now, yes; *we* wants it!”

- Gollum (Tolkein, 1990, *The Hobbit*, p. 85, italics added).

## Precious

Precious this jewel:  
 Mine own sense of Me.  
 And free, it resounds  
 In a glimmering ring  
 Of a Truth I should know,  
 And Inside I do,  
 Or so I might say if I'd been asked by you.

Bright like a star,  
 It's an ever-shine sun  
 Of the purest white light,  
 A connection to One  
 Who has made all of this,  
 All of us, and you too.  
 My precious connection,  
 From Me unto You

Don't douse me with the doubt of skeptics!  
 I reject your cold universe of relativity,  
 Of consequence by conscience,  
 Of constructed destiny.  
 I am no random comet!  
 No coalescence of blinding bright ice rock!  
 I am not cold inside  
 Like the cold of Nothing!  
 I am.  
 And so the What  
 Of my Amness  
 Is my warmth,  
 My Self - don't dare reject me.

Precious this jewel  
 I feel in my chest,  
 In my heart, in my breast  
 In my everLast breath.  
 Victor Frankl might say,  
 And perhaps he is right,  
 That humans in time ever cleave to the night  
 That must follow the day -  
 Fear the Death that must come.  
 And so Purpose Me, Self,  
 To the end when we're One.

Warm like the womb,  
 Like the life-giving Sun,  
 My self is my hope,  
 It cannot be undone.  
 I beg you desist  
 With your suspicious whisper,  
 Suspicion of Self,  
 Of my crowning ambition.  
 For what would I do without  
 Warmth in the night?  
 My Self is my right.  
 My Self is my right.

I am right in my Self.  
 Ever right.  
 Ever written.

**Owned**

I am Capital,  
Invested and used,  
Or vested with truth and abused –  
I am precious.

But i, now,  
Alone with that dot up above,  
Is my so(u)l(e) point of view,  
My footprint for you  
Only owned as I voices,

As i agony wrestle  
With choice, existential.

## Myself, Myself

Imagine a baby  
Looking in the mirror:  
Really just a sheet of glass,  
Fragile cracks  
And lead behind it,

Toxic.

"That's you!"  
says daddy.  
"There you are!"  
says mummy,  
pointing at the mirror.

That (3<sup>rd</sup> person indicative pronoun)  
Is you.

And now  
let's take baby's  
Right eye  
Because we don't want  
The Wrong  
One.

And pull it out,  
Ouch!  
Slowly, aching, reaching, searching.  
Then an easy "pop"  
for a net gain  
of a few inches.

Slowly pull towards the mirror,  
A foot now, baby feels the stretch,  
A tension just behind the forehead  
Arcing deeper into the behind places,  
Perhaps causing the hair that covers the  
Occipital lobe  
To tingle.

Let's pull that eye  
Towards the stark sheet of truth,  
Reflecting.  
By virtue of being reflective,  
It shows the truth,  
Shows it on a thin sheet of glass,  
Fragile,  
With some lead behind it,

Toxic.

Baby's eye meets mirror:  
The vision housed  
Meets the vision displayed,  
Sprayed now splayed,  
And like magic  
The eye *enters*  
Se(e/a)s  
Swimming in this new revelation.

That (3<sup>rd</sup> person indicative pronoun)  
Is you.

Baby knows the position *it*  
Locates  
From which *it* locutes (Leggo, 2001, para. 1),  
(a bundle of babble)  
Only from the outside.

Baby sees itself.  
Baby eyes its I, its eye, itself, its Self.

**Mirror**

In an elevator on Richards

I

Am elevated:

Mirror me, mirror

I'm highlighted by

Sick green light in

Brass handrails

An (') hypnotized I

Start

To

Watch mySelf curve, there -

Around that dark corner,

And into the black

Never distance.

Does that light ever

Tire of bouncing (?)

Back and forth we become

Perpetually seen.

Perpetually lost.

## Be Yourself

That title is a bit ambiguous. “Yourself” serves as the reflexive pronoun, highlighting that the object is the subject. But it also serves the appositive (Wulsin, n.d.), sort of highlighting the subject position. No, wait - I have made a mistake, for the appositive may require a comma here. And so my argument is derailed by an item of punctuation. Marks have such power. If I wish to highlight that “yourself” in “be yourself” may function as the appositive, I must include a comma. *Be, Yourself* should be my title.

But were the title to remain acoustic only, “be yourself” and “be, yourself” are still similar enough to be ambiguous; “yourself” then comes to describe both who is being and *what* that *who* is being. And if there is, indeed, a *who* to speak to, then it is already being, for it is right there (you’re presumably talking to it), it *exists*, so what sense does it make to then tell it to *be* unless we are directing it to be something else, or to be in a particular way? By saying “be yourself,” we are, indeed, directing in such a fashion: we are directing a “you” to be itself (“yourself”), which it is already doing, for if it weren’t, it would not be the “you” to which we were speaking. In other words, it makes no literal sense to direct anything to be itself if we take the verb *to be* as a description of “objective existence” (*Be*, n.d.). For if it were *being* anything other than itself, then it would very literally be something *else*, and would no longer (and did it ever?) constitute that to which we originally spoke.

One might argue that to say “be yourself” is in fact to say: “be *like*,” or “be *as*.” However, I believe that the sense of “be yourself,” as stated in the imperative, is indeed to be *like* or *as* who you *are*, i.e. who you *already* or *really* are. Any simile here sort of runs into a wall of reflexive veracity. “Yourself” implies that there might be some truthful, or at least, inherent way to be that is immediately available in the reflexive move. But if that reflexive move indicates the

subject of the action as well as the object then “yourself” refers to *you* right now, and at the same time, refers to that which you should be like. How can you be something already, and find a way to be *more* like it at the same time? And if you were not yourself, that is, not you, but could be more like yourself (again, meaning “more like you”), then you would not even *be* until you managed to be yourself. And if you are in a state in which you *can* be more like yourself, more like you, then you aren’t quite you yet, are you? If you are not you, then who are you? Who am I speaking to? Can *you* even exist?

What other fun can we have with this? Let’s turn this reflexive moment back on this cheeky writer. While telling me to “be myself” may be silly because for me to be here I must already be doing so, I still might do other things myself. I might *also* do other things *to* myself, myself. I might measure myself, myself. Or take care of myself, myself. Or walk myself, myself, though it sounds like I may also be walking my “self”, and so I am both walking and walking myself, and walking myself and my “self”, myself.

Good “Self”! Sit! Roll over. I am a good owner. My (1<sup>st</sup> person possessive) “self” is taken care of – I take care of it, myself. No cage. No kennel. Though sometimes I need a leash, myself, to leash my “self.” I have to constantly keep an eye (an “I”?) on it so it doesn’t do anything bad. Like attack people, or crap on the sidewalk. Sometimes cleaning up after my “self” is hard to do myself. Sometimes I forget the plastic bags, or they have holes and I get it on my hands. My “self” can produce a lot of crappy baggage, and I bear it myself. But I do love my “self.” And I know my “self” loves me. I know it. I’m sure of it. I tell my “self” I love it, and just know that it loves me back. It must. It wags its tail a lot. I get licks.

Where has this text gone? I do not walk my “self.” That seems absurd. And I wonder if I can even do anything [myself] without some implied preposition? It seems that in most other

cases when you [verb] yourself you are actually [verb]-ing something to/at/of yourself – there seems to be some direction, or some circle of momentum from where you are to where you are, from here to here again, to yourself.

Love myself? Well, no preposition there. But if I start to love my “self,” then is “myself” any longer appropriate, for the love that the “I” is doing here is no longer coming back to the “I”, but is instead being directed *to* a possessed object, the “I”’s “self,” *my* “self.”

Eat myself? Also, no preposition there. But what would that be like? You’d have to start with a part of yourself. Like maybe a finger. You’d somehow cut it off, maybe with a knife, fork it up, chew on it a bit (or perhaps crunch it actually, what with the bones and all), and swallow. And now, you’d have to go on to another finger, and so-on and so-forth. A hand, your arm. Maybe switch it up and savor your left leg for a bit. And while you still had limbs, things would progress rather smoothly (though you’d be getting rather full by now!). But eventually, you’d find yourself constrained by your own flexibility, perhaps legless, and missing an arm, you’d already have come up with a strategy for parceling out yourself with only one hand to work with, and at this point you’d probably be pretty exhausted. And really, you’d probably have bled out by now and died.

But perhaps you are trained very well in cauterization! Or maybe you’d made skilful use of a tourniquet! So maybe you *are* still alive! At this point, you’d have to start on your torso. Of course, that wouldn’t last too long – a few holes here and a few holes there, and you’d be into the area where you had just put all the rest of your parts – your stomach. And there you are, in your stomach, all packed into yourself, though no longer really organized the same way. Really more just sort of squished together and partially digested, sort of chemically “on your way,” the way you might be had you died without eating yourself and been reclaimed by the earth. Though



you're not in the earth. You're in yourself, so really, it is like you're reclaiming yourself.

Cauterization and tourniquets aside, now that you're into your own innards, you're probably bidding life goodbye with every passing second, so at this point, the exercise is over.

But wait! What if you were delicate enough to get around your stomach and preserve your inner workings? What if you were flexible enough to reach around to your back and other hard-to-get parts? Or what if you were magical or possessed of some divine power to preserve your Being (in the way you may know yourself To Be) while you mutilated your own body? With your magical prowess and other untold (but now told) abilities, what if you found a way to devour yourself until the very last little morsel, a morsel posing a serious problem: your mouth? How are you going to eat your mouth?

If you are "Being Yourself" like eating yourself, you run into the same problem as that illustrated by the latter endeavor: if your mouth is a part of who you are, you could never do it. You would have to eat your mouth, and how would you ever do that? That which is required for the action to be possible is consumed by the action. Or rather, if the action requires the consumption of that which makes it possible, it simply cannot occur. You require *you* to be, otherwise you are simply not here. The minute you must be yourself, then to the extent that you somehow aren't being yourself already, you are out of the picture. Because, by definition, you are being already.

But if your "self" is indeed something other that you *can* be, then it doesn't map, and never has, to the existence described by *you*, so what sense does "be your self" then make? It makes sense if we understand the injunction as one to "become": "become your self." That acknowledges a process whereby *you* are left behind to become something else. But "yourself," which is the word in question, locates the *what* of what you should become, in *you*. It is a

recursive loop of logic that contends that we might, as 1<sup>st</sup> person singular subjects (as an “I”), be some *thing* without leaving behind what we were before that *thing*. To the extent that that *thing* is, in actual fact, a pointer back to what “you” is (and thus, by virtue of being so, what you still *are*), then the phrase “be yourself” is really just an injunction to

Exist.

So why do we say it? All we are ever doing is being, so what is so important that we have to remind ourselves to do something that, were we to ever stop doing it, we wouldn’t even be around to know about? And if it is an injunction to be *like* or *as*, an injunction to be something other than what you are, or how you are, it would be much clearer to say something like: “be this,” or “be that,” or “be good,” or “be a man.” Why do we confuse this? Perhaps combining the injunction to be with a model object that one *possesses* (a “self” that is yours or mine that describes how to be), somehow reinforces or guarantees the *being*? If Butler’s (2004) described “eradication of our being” (p. 23) is accurate, then maybe the extent to which I lose possession of my “I” via my “self” is the extent to which I face eradication: I do not just exist, but I must constantly *claim* existence via some truth of being I possess. And what perpetuates is a singular possession of subject position. And how am “I” existing here?

There is the ache of something here. Some agony. I want something. But if I am a “self”, or if “I” dislocates and possesses itself, then in declaring that “I want,” I am actually saying that I am a “self” wanting. Suddenly, my speaking “I” must *be* something other before it *does* anything insofar as my action is representative of the “I” from which, and of which, I speak. And this is particularly interesting when it comes to notions of authenticity, for to the extent that my actions are not congruent with my “true” “self” is the extent to which I am able to sort of once-remove from accountability. The constant unknown of who I *really* am, insofar as my

“self” or “true self,” objectifies such a pinnacle and defines a flexibility whereby I may divorce myself, my “I,” from its actions, words, spoken moments to the extent that “I was not myself,” and yet may still take credit for any qualities I ascribe to this “self” which I can (or fail to) be. And so we become ghosts, haunting our “I”-s, our seeing eyes. What does that do to *us*?

### Full of myself

I want, a body  
 Wracking me,  
 Lacking a ( ) I may  
 Claim, I am starved, My self  
 Wanting  
 Me, lacking.

### Empty

I hunger for something,  
 Some person I  
 Want  
 To be, happy,  
 Not happy here,  
 Needing.

I need something  
 I need to get I  
 Need to be I  
 Need to eat.

So Eat yourself.

I'll give it my  
 Best EFFORT.

And now I have no legs  
 And only one arm.  
 I am bleeding.  
 I am full of myself,  
 Full of my own yearning,  
 My starving,  
 My wanting,  
 I want (to be),  
 Full,  
 And hurting.

## I Ghost

Transparent I  
Expose everything behind me,  
Linger ragged, grey, and raging silently  
Available,  
Moaning, yearning,  
My storms never heard.  
I ache in this agony of touch,  
This surface dwelling,  
Watching myself,  
Watching myself,  
Watching myself.

My body's breath,  
Ever blown through me,  
Drifts with a warmth  
I can only ever  
Approximate.  
And the differential,  
Perpetually calculating,  
Spins my chaotic existence,  
Ever liminal,  
Ever there,  
Following, I follow.

As eyes catch a glimmer  
Of what houses them,  
In glass,  
Perhaps I may stretch this agony over,  
Reach and brush my chilly fingers  
On that warm beating heart,  
That flushed cheek  
I know to be my own  
(-ed).

## Possibilities for the Emergence of “Self ”

In *The history of sexuality: An introduction, volume I*, Michel Foucault (1990) offers some thought that might provide a possibility for how a “self” comes to be located inside a body rather than on it, a state of affairs that perhaps makes it understandable why such a “self” might be thought of as owned by the “I.” Foucault traces discourse of sexuality, ties that discourse to power relations, and does so by describing a particular feature of the West, one in which individual speech came to be a sort of product or production: the confession:

Since the Middle Ages at least, Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth: the codification of the sacrament of penance by the Lateran Council in 1215, with the resulting development of confessional techniques, the declining importance of accusatory procedures in criminal justice, the abandonment of tests of guilt (sworn statements, duels, judgments of God) and the development of methods of interrogation and inquest, the increased participation of the royal administration in the prosecution of infractions, at the expense of proceedings leading to private settlements, the setting up of tribunals of Inquisition: all this helped to give the confession a central role in the order of civil and religious powers. The evolution of the word *avowal* and of the legal function it designated is itself emblematic of this development: from being a guarantee of the status, identity, and value granted to one person by another, it came to signify someone’s acknowledgement of his own actions and thoughts. For a long time, the individual was vouched for by the reference of others and the demonstration of his ties to the commonweal (family, allegiance, protection); then he was authenticated by the discourse of truth he was able or obliged to pronounce concerning himself. (p. 58)

Foucault illustrates the pervasion of confession in Western society:

The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. One confesses in public and in private, to one's parents, one's educators, one's doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell to anyone else, the things people write books about. One confesses – or is forced to confess. When it is not spontaneous or dictated by some internal imperative, the confession is wrung from a person by violence or threat; it is driven from its hiding place in the soul, or extracted from the body. Since the Middle Ages, torture has accompanied it like a shadow, and supported it when it could go no further: the dark twins. The most defenseless tenderness and the bloodiest of powers have a similar need of confession. Western man has become a confessing animal. (p. 59)

Foucault then goes on to describe that the depth to which the confession is embedded in Western society has rendered perception of it as something intrinsic to freedom rather than a feature of a power relation. And this is particularly important for any experiential account of expression or subjectivity, for it casts some doubt on any felt sense of exoneration that may accompany such acts. Confessing, expressing our truth from within, may not be some inherent condition of being a human being, but rather may an indication of something to which (or by which) we have been subjected:

The obligation to confess is relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, “demands” only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power weighs it down, and it can finally be articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation... (p. 60)

Foucault's last line is almost cathartic: in confession, something is surmounted, overcome, and something else is freed, expunged, liberated, a price we pay for freedom, a currency. Foucault neatly ties this liberation of discourse to the power relation he is trying to describe, specifically illustrating the evaluative nature of the process and its transformative consequences:

The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation. (p. 61)

For Foucault, one confessed and thereby produced a discourse that was ultimately evaluated for, and that same time constituted as, some truth. For me, the similarities between Foucault's confession and the current general manifestation of talk psychotherapy shout too loudly to be ignored. Someone talks, produces discourse about their Inner world, authenticating a “discourse



of truth” about him- or her- self, and his or her experiences, while another person listens, perhaps evaluates it, at least authenticates it, witnesses it, and in this process, some transformation occurs. What is going on here? Tracing Foucault’s topic, *sexuality*, illustrates that the particular power relation emerging in the West was one in which the State regulated *life*, and in which Individuals aspired to something perhaps describable as *lifestyle*.

This is the background that enables us to understand the importance assumed by sex as a political issue. It was at the pivot of the two axes along which developed the entire political technology of life. On the one hand it was tied to the disciplines of the body: the harnessing, intensification, and distribution of forces, the adjustment and economy of energies. On the other hand, it was applied to the regulation of populations, through all the far-reaching effects of its activity. (p. 145)

Discourse became an avenue along which the State was invited to interact with the Individual, or rather, his or her truth of being. And perhaps this answers the question of what might have been happening, for as the truth of an individual’s discourse was established in the confessing mechanism, perhaps something was attained:

One no longer aspired toward the coming of the emperor of the poor, or the kingdom of the latter days, or even the restoration of our imagined ancestral rights; what was demanded and what served as an objective was life, understood as the basic needs, man’s concrete essence, the realization of his potential, a plenitude of the possible. (p. 145)

In return for regulation of life, the state “served” the meeting of needs, the realization of potential to its subjects. Oh, how this paradigm resonates with Maslow’s Hierarchy: needs, essence, potential (Carlson, 1993, p. 364; Carver & Schier, 1992, p. 413). Can some of the language of therapy (reflexive story, “self,” “inner truth,” “my truth,” “my story”), *in* therapy, be

the location of a power relation similar to Foucault's "truthful confession"? If so, given that the confession is a kind of testimony, and given the echo between Foucault's "secret nature" (p. 60) and Derrida's (2000) "secret" of testimony (p. 30), can one graft Derrida into Foucault and acknowledge the presence of an emerging "I"? Is the autonomous quality of this "I", or the autonomy it grants, described by Foucault's statement: "The truthful confession was inscribed at the heart of the procedures of individualization *by power*" (p 58, italics added)? I think so. But there is an added layer: As an instituted mode of producing discourse, one became accountable in confession not just for the truth of one's words, but also for its very production. Confession produced a discourse which secured, solidified, granted; confession "exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation" (p. 62). Lack of such a production, arguably, failed to secure such things, perhaps even condemned and precluded one from them. This situation, then, located one's ability to secure one's aspirations *within* oneself, as the primal stuff of discourse. Be it guilt, thoughts of sin, testimony, the currency of confession had a source now: one's "secret nature" (p. 60), the Inner. And so the "I", by virtue of emerging to ensure the truth of such testimony, additionally *evidenced* the Inner from which it came. Speaking truth became speaking the Inner, the Inner was verified by the presence of the "I," and for all of this production, the attendant body became constantly accountable.

Is this what "self" is? Is it some sort of currency?

Not only might we be "I"-s for each other, testifying to the truth of each other, but we might also be "I"-s that produce identities, "selves", for the purpose of securing a life, perhaps a life upon which to place Butler's (2004) human. Isn't it interesting that "self actualization" (which might be read as "making the self real") is at the top of Maslow's Hierarchy, thereby

resting *upon* the struggle to ensure bodily persistence, “physiological needs” (Carlson, 1993, p. 364)? Does this “self” derive from Foucault’s “truthful confession”? In my Psychology 100 textbook, the given example for a self actualizing person was Mother Theresa (Carlson, 1993, p. 365). Isn’t that an interesting little connection?

The idea that “self” is a historical object is not new (Danziger, 2003; Cushman, 1990; Baumeister, 1987). Cushman (1990) engages in an analysis of the “self” (though he does not quote it like that), and of how discourse has produced a current “self” that is *empty*. He goes on to illustrate how such an *empty self* might function in a post World-War II capitalist consumer America, linking qualities of this “self” object to socio-historical contexts:

I believe that in the post-World War II era in the United States, there are indications that the *present* configuration of the bounded, masterful self is the empty self. By this I mean that our terrain has shaped a self that experiences a significant absence of community, tradition, and shared meaning. It experiences these social absences and their consequences “interiorly” as a lack of personal conviction and worth, and it embodies the absences as a chronic, undifferentiated emotional hunger. The post-World War II self thus yearns to acquire and consume as an unconscious way of compensating for what has been lost: it is empty. (p. 600)

Cushman goes on to state his thesis clearly, elaborating on the particular way that the social sciences have helped to propagate this *empty self*:

The thesis of this article is that the current self is constructed as empty, and as a result the state controls its population not by restricting the impulses of its citizens, as in Victorian times, but by creating and manipulating their wish to be soothed, organized, and made cohesive by momentarily filling them up. The products of the social sciences, and of

psychology in particular, have often worked to the advantage of the state by helping to construct selves that are the subjects of control and to develop techniques that are the means of control. (p. 600)

For Cushman, the empty self seeks to fill itself through consuming things, and the surrounding culture exists to provide those very things for consumption, exists to meet their need "to be soothed" (p. 600). "Selves" go about producing and consuming, producing and consuming.

Considering Foucault, can we then ask: is being a "self" about producing a discourse of identity such that one might secure control over one's biological life enough that one may then be free to engage in further growth, perhaps pursuing pleasure, experience, moral development (as Mother Theresa was, I believe, meant to exemplify)? Or is this discourse production the very currency we pay for membership in this relation? Are we "selves" so that we may efficiently grow, produce, and reproduce within a system of power relations that requires such production? Do we reify this power relation by doing so, by being "selves"? Is such growth a good thing? I will invoke David Suzuki's (n.d.) thought on "growth" as a tentative answer:

One of the really destructive aspects of our economic structure is its demand for steady growth. Growth is an absolute necessity. If you come to a plateau in business, you are finished. Economic growth in our society is equated with progress, and nobody wants to stop progress. So if growth is progress, we can never admit that we have enough. We always need to have more. The destructive impulse of the economy is immense, and its appetite is insatiable. This monster is intent on consuming the world. As Paul Ehrlich points out, there are only two systems on the planet that aspire to endless growth: cancer cells and economists. In both cases, the inevitable result of unstoppable growth is the same-death.

## Grow

What is this "grow",  
 This perpetual  
 Stretch this  
 Reach this  
 Find this  
 And this  
 And I grow  
 Till I become as tall as the Heavenly sky,  
 As large as the world.  
 I become(s) this world now.  
 And every ecstatic  
 Breath belies the lie  
 Of my ecstasy (Butler, 2004, p. 20):  
 No outside  
 To me anymore.  
 Just I, and  
 I grow.

So who is this quotable "we"  
 That you use to describe  
 Us  
 Growing?  
 And why not just we,  
 Not "we", for who are "we"  
 When you say: "We grow?"

I don't like this "we",  
 It stretches me, pulls  
 Me too thin.  
 I am see-through,  
 And who sees us now?  
 Even as I,  
 Like a plastic bag  
 Over a nameless face,  
 Suffocate *us*  
 With my own breathed being,  
 With my "self",  
 With my "growth",  
 Stretch my thin languaged face  
 Over us, ever bloating, "we"  
 "Grow."

**capital-eyes**

and so inner lies  
my capital I's  
first letters of sentences  
capitalized  
but i see with my eyes  
not my "I"s  
that my letters  
are capital  
eyes don't  
reject them  
as lies.

**Soothe**

Soothe this  
Our *agony*,  
This Us:  
You and I,  
We are Soothed  
Here and now,  
And Forsooth!  
We are placed!  
And I sooth  
For you, I  
Testify  
To this truth,  
Ever soothing  
Our selves,  
Here and now,  
You and I.

## Selfish

It was strange, and even at ten years old I knew that this was a bit out of the ordinary. Kind of like when adults told you something like “nice try,” or “great effort,” when the tragedy of being last in a race, or slowest on the ice, or worst on the team, was staring you in the face, had been staring at you in the face all year, was written on the faces of all the other kids when they stared at you. I felt so exposed.

“Group”

That’s what this was. I was going to “group.”

You may think that an encounter group for ten year olds is a strange idea. I wouldn’t really know how strange it was since this was the only group I had experienced, and like many things, it doesn’t take long before familiarity numbs whatever danger sense might have been tingling – it’s not like life-threatening things were happening. At least, not outwardly. I think I began getting used to it on the third week.

It was in downtown Vancouver, in the old Georgia building – the one they demolished several years ago. It no longer exists at that location, though here, right now, I can see it. I remember one sunny day, driving there in the car with my mom along Cornwall Ave., somewhere just before the brewery. That Molson clock was framed by a blue sky with white puffy clouds. And I was short enough that I could look up and see it from the passenger seat without having to crane my neck forward. We must have been close to the bridge, since in the right side of my memory I can see the brown bricks of the building that sits at the corner of Burrard and Cornwall. Or maybe I only see them now. I remember the presence of my mom on my left, looking forward out the windshield, talking and driving, not looking at me so that we were safe on the road.



Looking away from me so that we were safe.

“All your friends will be there: Jesse, Claire, Allehandro and Kim...”

“I know.”

I’m not sure if, in my later years, I ever stated how much I hated that place. Mind you, I’m not sure if I even knew that I hated it, only that I had an ever abiding nervousness about going, an ever present dread anticipation that never went away.

But, like I said, as with many things, it doesn’t take long before familiarity calms you down. My favorite place in the Georgia building was the lobby – the place you stood just before you left. I liked the elevators too. I remember lots of brass, and a warm orangey brown smell in the place. I remember the buttons, and the heavy quiet as the elevator rose. I remember the slight lurch in my belly as it accelerated as well as when it slowed. I remember the

Ding!

The doors open, and everything was a warren. The halls of his office were small and convoluted. My room was almost right across from the elevator, I think. Or maybe his office was, and my room was in from his office? That’s probably more accurate, though for some reason, in my memory, my chair was much closer to the elevator. Much closer to escape. Most times when I walked in, everyone else had already arrived. The chairs were always placed in a circle, and a window looked out upon the street. Some of the kids made jokes about spitting out the window. And I may have done it once, I’m not sure. Maybe that was another building, another time. There were anywhere from six to ten of us, with one adult. And it would start, and it would finish, and then I was back on the elevator, into that glorious lobby (“I knew you’d be waiting”), and out the door to the car, back home to my friends. My mom said that the people at group were my friends. I could never figure that out, since I never really played with them.

They were simply the people at the place I had to go to on Wednesday evenings. A place that got in the way of watching TV, or going over to Sanjay's house to play Atari, or do anything with my other friends. It wasn't horrible, having such a place. It just became something familiar that was always slightly in the way. Like Plantar warts, group was something slightly uncomfortable that was always there but that I came to take for granted as an unchangeable feature of my existence.

Then one day, I got homework. There was another kid, Gaile, who I knew outside of group. Maybe I went to school with her. Well, I guess Gaile decided not to show up for a week or two, and the psychiatrist was concerned with her absence. I remember feeling so happy that I had something to anchor on: I knew her! Finding things to say in this place was a hard thing to do, so I knew this one could do no wrong.

"I know Gaile" I said, not realizing that I had just offered something.

"Well, you can call her on the phone, then, and let her know that all her friends miss her here."

Dread,  
Sinking, my belly full of eels,  
Slithering dark down my intestines  
To my anus –  
*Clinch* –  
Can't let them out,  
All the evil and mess  
Jellified,  
My body glued  
To this chair,  
Here, never anywhere else  
But here, ever here.

"Well... I don't really *know* her..."

"Yes but you know her better than anyone else. I will get you her number and you will call her." Abrupt, not even looking at me, looking instead towards that space in the middle where

visions cavorted and reached out to stroke my nervous hands with their promise. “Just tell her that her friends miss her.”

To be fair, I’ve always been scared of the phone. But I wasn’t a super gregarious kid, so the prospect of phoning some girl who I knew by name and sight at ten years old was terrifying. But what was *really* terrifying was that kids my age just didn’t say things like “your friends miss you.” I knew then and there that what I was trying to do was to get her to come back to this place. And I like to believe today that I felt some sort of quiet cheer for her that she had the guts not to come, but I’m not even sure about that – because that kind of thought got punished, and besides, this place wasn’t sooo bad – I wasn’t getting hit or anything, and there was the quiet elevator.

A week went by and of course I didn’t call her. Too scared. This was the aftermath:

\*\*\*

*I sit in my chair, nervous. I haven’t done my homework. I didn’t clean my room. I hate being yelled at. What’s going to happen to me? I can barely feel anything on my skin. No, I feel everything on my skin. I feel Sally shift in her chair like she’s sitting on my chest. I feel Bill, the adult’s, breathing like it sucks me in and out. I feel the cars out side race up and down my right shoulder and I silently wish that they would take me away. Numbness isn’t feeling nothing. Numbness is feeling everything that is within 100 feet directly on your skin – like when you rub your arm too much and it starts to feel like something else – numbness is being a walking wound, and everything that moves around you is salt.*

*I am already wounded.*

*He walks in, doesn’t look at me, sits silent with his head down. I think someone is talking, I have to look away, but I feel him there, like a knife pressed against my skin. No, like a five foot*

*stove element that is burning me because it's too close, and plans on getting closer, only I don't know when.*

*"Yes," he says to a kid who has just shared a feeling or two, "that's because you are a caring person." She's crying now, basking in the light of atonement, or anointment, or sanction, or prayer, or something.*

*Silence.*

*"Did you call Gaile?" His words float into the middle like dark clouds.*

*"No," I say, surprised that he is not yelling. I look at the ground, but I start to feel like maybe this was going to be okay. "I just didn't feel comfortable." Courage lived here, but nobody told me about it. And nobody told me just how bad it would get.*

*"I just didn't feel comfortable'" he mocks.*

*I look at him, because he's staring at me now.*

*"I didn't feel comfortable'" he mocks again, ice blue eyes, and mine cast down in shame. Up comes his finger like a gun: "You didn't call her...", he says with distaste, "because you are Selfish!"*

*The bullet.*

\*\*\*

The next week in group, he walked in and sat down with us sometime in the middle of proceedings. I was scared that whole week. I didn't know what to do. Should I even come? Was I allowed to? What could I do to make this right? I believed they got an adult to phone Gaile. I found out it was him:

*"I owe you an apology," he says, again looking to the middle of the circle – he didn't even say my name, so he could have been talking to anyone. "I called her myself, and now I*

understand why you didn't want to call – all I got was manipulating whining and little-girl speak. No wonder you felt odd about it.”

Ah, the warm ray of forgiveness.

And that was it. Maybe he made eye contact – I'm not sure, I have two memories of it. Either way, I was grateful for it. After all, I guess I should be strong enough to take being yelled at and called “selfish” by a scary psychiatrist in his office and in front of a bunch of other people. At least I should be strong enough to understand that maybe it wasn't intended to harm, and that such throw-away forgiveness should be all I need to be back and strong and a healthy and contributing member of the group.

He called me Selfish.

I was grateful.

And Gaile *was* a “little girl.” She was 8.

It is heinous to scream such things at a child the way he did. But I think many people who might be reading this already agree. And whether or not you do, I should state that I do not believe that “selfish” was the most destructive part of what he said. For he said:

**“You Are Selfish.”**

**Branded**

You Are.  
And so:  
You are *for me*,  
For everyone.  
A walking wound  
For everyone.

## Knife

I got cut with a knife,  
Deep but not long,  
And quick, but aching,  
Slicing,  
Ever moving out.

The doctor put his  
Fingers on each side of my cut and

### *Pried*

To see if there was dirt.

He held the skin open.  
I could feel the air  
In the place under my skin.  
It was cold.  
And sure enough,  
There was dirt.  
So he pried and clamped,  
Pulled my cut apart,  
Kept it open.

His instrument  
(That's what it was called)  
Was long, sharp, cold and metal  
Poking around down there.  
It hurts, but you  
Take it.  
He's the doctor after all,  
And it's necessary.  
We don't want infection.  
Have to clean the wound.  
Be clean.  
And all the time I feel that knife  
Dull ache slicing my  
Skin he kept

### *Open,*

And cold.

In time,  
My skin slowly comes  
Together again.  
That's what stitches are for.

But even sewn up,  
On the inside,  
On the underneath,  
I feel an icy breath like  
The doctor  
Is still prying my wound

### *Open.*

The next time I had a cut  
I brought my game face,  
Knew what to do.  
Mastered my fear.  
"He has courage, alright – you have  
Courage," he said.

I placed my own fingers  
On the skin beside  
My slicing cut  
And pried,

### *Pried*

Open my wound  
For the doctor to clean  
With his icy instrument.  
Quivering.

## Echoes

Imagery I remember,  
I remember so well and intimately,  
And I am not ready to discard  
But perhaps re interpret  
No  
De-interpret.

A sun crusted black,  
But bleeding its light  
Rays are streaming forth and breaking my  
Scabbed encrusted shell.  
Black death of stasis and heavy,  
The crust was limned in light,  
Yellow and orange and white,  
And bright, and it was  
Me...  
No de-  
interpret this.

My soul pure within and  
Breaking  
Out finally...  
No de-  
Interpret this.

A huge weight carried  
And starting to shed.  
A truth always known,  
But never bled,  
White, not red, and purely...  
No de-  
Interpret this.

An egg with a black shell  
cracking like dried blood scabs,  
Just a little, but it's enough,  
For I am ready,  
Ready to finally break free...  
No de-  
Interpret this.

In a basement.  
Drugged up and bound by belief  
That in my Inner lied a "self",  
A pure potential needing truthing,  
And I needed this, the lie I felt was (in) me,  
Lies a haunted.  
Psychedelic visions  
Lack of food and  
People yelling,  
People crying,  
One man dying  
Maybe – I can't tell,  
Not now anyway.  
I felt a soul battle here  
In front of me...  
No de-  
Interpret this.

I watched two men do CPR.  
I applauded the victims  
"Choice"  
To return to life,  
Watched him sit there for a few hours,  
Listened to him talk.  
No ambulance was called.

Witness the commitment  
To the freeing soothing of my Self,  
To the implicit assumption of  
Ever-Shackles,  
Ever-Struggles,  
The agonistic ever-suffer  
And righteous acknowledgement of  
Inner salvation,  
Inner Truth  
In the place where my Inner  
Lies.

And my skin cracks,  
And there is only blood beneath.

## Mourning Glory

It's so hard to work when you're mourning.  
 The dreams I've lost  
 To my "Self", or my struggle to be my "Self" are  
 Remnants remembered only in the last moments  
 As they sand and trickle  
 Through my stasis fingers.  
 I am reduced to the poet's celebration  
 Of the once was, but never known.

It is so hard to work when you're mourning.  
 And so hard to know when you're trying to work  
 That you're mourning  
 Something so profound that it once  
 Surround  
 Dead you against other sparks of inspiration,  
 A sure path never questioned,  
 Embodied,  
 And now clouded  
 In the shroud of what used to be.  
 But I never perceived it, until it  
 Used to be.

My heart is not dark,  
 Save for shadows of this dark place  
 Cast by the light of what I remembered once.  
 So hard to know, when inspiration comes,  
 Whether or not it is phantom remembrance.  
 So hard to find the candle in my hand  
 Snuffed out by taking for granted its treasure  
 As my misplaced recognition,  
 My strange proprioception.  
 "Was that me right there?"

It has not come back, my dream,  
 And every new one  
 Is snuffed in recognition.  
 "This is who I am."

I remember it,  
 And only ever then,  
 Remember the rest too.



**Yourself**

Why be yourself when you can be  
The anyone you've ever dreamed  
Or anyone you'd ever wanted,  
Something other it has always seemed.

Who is yourself now anyway,  
But someone that you've always  
Wished you were  
Or hoped you are  
Or want to be?  
They look at you,  
You look at me from day to day.

I ever wonder if I'll ever get  
To feel a constant knowing that  
I'm just myself and never  
Anyone or other different from  
The "me" I wish to be  
At any moment or forever?

## Potential

I remember sitting in the back seat. It was nighttime. Or, at least, it was dark outside. The streetlights were winking their luminescence as they flashed by at 50 km/h, or whatever speed we were approaching. We are always approaching.

*Blink blink blink*

“I want to be a teacher.”

I had said.

I might have been twelve years old and in grade seven. I might have been seventeen and in grade twelve. I cannot remember. Or, at least, my remembering doesn't seem to have any fixed numeracy to it except perhaps in the odd reflection those numbers seem to create between each other, their odd repetition, their quantum poetry.

“I want to be a teacher.”

Now I've said it twice, once for both times I can't remember.

I do remember that I was on my way to or from hockey. So it was a common scene: me in the dark back seat, the streetlights winking ever on/off and always with cheek, on my cheek I should say, so I was probably flickering in the rear view mirror every time my father's eyes strayed there to find me instead of the road traveled, left behind. Me. Not what passed/past.

“Chris, if there's one thing I know (because I don't know much) it is that you will not be happy unless you do something that allows you to achieve your potential.”

*Blink blink blink*

I might have been sweaty at that moment. Still dressed in my gear, perhaps going home. No, I don't think so – nobody was going home here. I was heading to the rink for sure, situated on the middle part of the back seat, my head craning forward reaching in futility for the space

between my parents. My potential-ridden father, my (at that moment) silent mother. And I'm not even sure she was silent except to say that the

Words in whose  
Wake I was carried  
Were father's,  
Melodiously melancholy  
For me, even my  
Memories  
Wink again,

*wink*

In those glowing streetlights,  
The night light,  
In Voltage I'm carried  
But who carries me?  
What current  
*Careers*  
Me again  
Ever through winking streetlights?

"What does it matter if I love it? I mean, I love teaching, know I want to do it. It is a hard job to do well, and means and matters so much. Isn't that potential? Isn't it worthy?"

I must have been seventeen. Mind you, I could have been twelve, and I might be leaving out the part where I ask:

"What does 'potential' mean?"

I must have been in my street clothes, no longer needing to dress at home so that I would not have to uncover in the dressing room, exposed to the wandering gaze of others, comfortable now with the winking light on my face. I must have been thinking of yet the third (or maybe fourth) in a string of brilliant teachers who had inspired me. I must have already seen that career counsellor who had made it clear to me that if there was anything I could know clearly about myself, it was that I was easily inspired.

How much might we undermine with statements of I(d)entity?

And I'm pretty sure I was not driving the car. And so my parents must have come to watch my game this evening because they wanted to, not because I needed a ride – but they always enjoyed it. I was pretty fast. I was potent. I had an invitation from an American university to consider their hockey program. I might have already written that sincere letter that said, "I want to focus on my education, but please keep me informed about your hockey program." I may not have been old enough to realize that I would never hear from them again. I still may not be old enough. But whatever:

"I want to be a teacher."

I have applied for the Bachelor of Education program at UBC four times.

I have been accepted four times.

*Blink blink blink.... Blink.*

All four times, I have quit before the start of the first day.

## Queen Potential

Your sumptuous decree  
Is an aggrandizing promise  
To "be  
What you can be,"  
And "In Me  
Is your destiny."  
And it's funny  
How nobody knows  
What dreams will come true  
Until they do.

Thou Art untouchable.  
Your -I- face  
Faces  
Us slightly downcast.  
Electric chin slightly raised,  
We chisel away,  
A way by the mirror,  
Your glance ever slightly  
Above us.

A man in this place  
Plays piano in place  
With broken fingers.  
Knuckles rolling on teeth  
Like pirates:  
Roll the bones, lad -  
Roll 'em!  
Only here is his gamble  
A flow of precision.  
His black and white bruises  
Stain harmonies riding  
The edge of his rolling dice,  
Terrors of butterfly chaos  
Emerge in his symphony notes  
Flying high away now  
Unremembered but present.

And this man, he once,  
Fingers switched with a  
Bamboo reed punishing  
Tongues burned the back of his  
Life-giving neck,  
Picked a brush up in his now tomorrow,

And felt fleeting touches  
Of mourning just there beneath fingernails.

And he wondered,  
For all the dirt gathered there  
(From scratching through his existence,  
From clinging to the earth  
For a fear of falling),  
How he possibly

*Could.*

The brush said,  
"Paint with me what you will, sir Artist,  
For I see magic in the black of your pupils,  
Gravities and quasars, and  
Newton had it wrong,  
For the universe is music  
And I hear the echoes of its children  
In your undertones,  
In the sorry of your smile,  
In the rage behind your  
Meek generosity,  
The ever of your up-give."

And this man,  
For twenty minutes,  
Painted.

But fingers ache enough,  
And necks remember,  
And he can only ever hold  
A talking brush for little wiles.

For Queen Potential wrote  
Herself, decreed it long ago.  
Who was he to think  
His dabbling  
Ever measured her Big Bang,  
Her stony gaze?

"You,"  
She commands,  
"Have Me!"

## Metaphysical Interlude

I was taught in high school that an electron is a particle of negative charge that revolves around an atom. Then I found out in university Chemistry that it may not revolve at all, but instead, that it may simply exist *somewhere* in a group of fields of potential that surround an atom (Petrucchi, 1989). In his book, *The Elegant Universe* Brian Greene (1999) seeks to introduce the everyday person to String Theory, a relatively new theory that is exciting some physicists because it may reconcile the two large theories of the universe: Einstein's General Relativity, and Quantum Mechanics. The book eventually takes the reader to a discussion of the electron, introducing us to "one of the greatest theoretical physicists since Einstein," (p. 108) one Richard Feynman. The problem facing Feynman was the ambiguous behaviour of electrons. A previous series of experiments had demonstrated that when electrons were fired one-at-a-time at a screen with a hole in it, the pattern of their travel, as indicated by a destination screen that recorded their final location, showed that the electrons traveled through the one hole in a relatively straight line. But when electrons were fired one at-a-time at a sheet with *two* holes in it, the resulting recorded locations indicated that the electrons somehow interfered with each other in a wave-like fashion through both holes. Feynman argued that, in fact, each singular electron interfered with itself: each electron traveled through *both* holes:

The probability that the electron – always viewed as a particle through and through – arrives at any chosen point on the screen is built up from the combined effect of every possible way of getting there. This is known as Feynman's 'sum-over-paths' approach to quantum mechanics.... But no matter how absurd nature is when examined on microscopic scales, things must conspire so that we recover the familiar prosaic happenings of the world experienced on everyday scales. To this end, Feynman showed

that if you examine the motion of large objects... *all paths but one cancel each other out* when their contributions are combined. In effect, only one of the infinity of paths matters as far as the motion of the object is concerned. (p. 111)

Though it may be mind boggling that an electron can travel in two (or more) places at the same time, there also hints of excitement here: if electrons can do this, and we are made of electrons, can we do this? As tempting as it is to make that kind of leap, we run into a problem. The electron's behaviour is measurable. There is evidence of the electron traveling through both holes. But the electron does this, in part, because of its incredibly small size. At larger scales, as Greene describes (1999) above, only one path matters – the rest cancel out. We are of larger scale. We're big! So if we're here, and talking, sitting, reading, all of our possible paths have already cancelled out. Here we are. Can *you* exist before this moment? You are faced with choices every day, but do you travel all of them before you appear at one? And keep in mind that if we do make the leap from an electron to a person, we are very specifically talking about a body, for that is the material of a person in which an electron is housed. Does your body do this? And even if you claim that you do, do you somehow have control over this, or are you, rather, simply a very aware *result*?

I'm not sure that the behaviour of electrons is an apt bridge between quantum mechanics and the field of Psychology, though words like "potential" and "choice" may tease us to try. But as a metaphor for *language*, perhaps the case of the electron can generate possibilities about the locative function of words. Indeed, as described by Greene, Feynman reasoned that an electron's behaviour is heavily determined by the experimenter. The experimenter, in choosing to constrain the electron to one or two possible paths, determines whether or not the electron cancels all its paths, or travels a few (p. 109). The electron is not choosing whether or not to

travel only one path – it is the experimenter, firing the electron out of a gun at one or two slits who measures and thus locates the electron. Are we measured by language? Located by it? What if a word, every time it is cited, acts very much like a measurement? What if I, in speaking “I, myself,” myself, somehow locate something with language, in language, somehow position a point of view, an eye for my “I,” or maybe an “I” for my eyes, or “I”-s? And rather than stating that I do this, what if “I” *does* this? What if language measures *us*? What if, rather than seeking a “location for locution” (Leggo, 2001), locution locates? What if language does this quite outside of any “you” or “I”, until having been measured/located/positioned at this site, we, in the sense of “you and I,” come to be here and now, in that moment of speaking. When we are cited, are we thereby sited, sighted?



**Stasis**

The I is a  
*Placement.*  
I am placed  
In peace,  
Plac—ed(id)  
In rig(id)  
Retainership.

### The problem with *The Matrix* (Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999)

The problem with *The Matrix* (and I'll leave the lingering ambiguity of that indicator to simply linger; the movie and what the movie is about all folded in on itself; the symbol and referent collapsing; the thing and its thingy), is that it still presupposes consciousness; humans exist *in* the matrix, whatever humans are.

What is real? How do you define real? If you're talking about your senses, what you feel, taste, smell, or see, then all you're talking about are electrical signals interpreted by your brain. (p. 47)

Morpheus explains to Neo that any notion of "real" is just a notion of perception, and that controlling such perception was the key that the Machines (the enemy) used to control a human being:

All they [the machines] needed to control this new battery [human beings] was something to occupy our mind.... and so they built a prison out of our past, wired it to our brains and turned us into slaves. (p. 50)

Even construed as bags of chemical energy, humans in the story are still built upon the notion that there is something inside a human being/battery that can perceive. In *the Matrix* (meaning the thing, not the story, even though the thing is a story), despite the fact that even our bodies are unrealized – our sense of them usurped and fed with neural impulses such that we feel our bodies in ways far more fantastic than real – somehow there is still an *us* to perceive, to be affected and effected (defected?). In short, if the reality of our potential is described by the stasis and consumption of our bodies, then to posit a human existence in the mind, in which a body is still felt (however artificially), requires a *something* to feel it, to experience it.

So just what lives in the mind to do this feeling if the body is only so much neural signal? The potential to experience life as a super human within the Matrix requires one's understanding of the very constructionist living situation; that one's real body is somewhere else. But if your brain is a part of that body, just who is this *you* living in *your* mind? What is your mind without your very biological and physical brain? The position that one is effected in the Matrix (meaning the thing, not the movie), either by being affected by the machines, or through the knowledge of one's "true" liberation, requires a notion of *becoming*. To be effected is to come into being (*Effect*, n.d.), while to be affected is to have something affect you, and so you must be there in the latter case to receive it, you must already exist (*Affect* n.d.). And should you be like Neo and have the ability to effect yourself, well... how could you? You must have been there to do the effecting, which means you were already there, so whatever result was effected in your effectation just can't be you. Unless you really were there to begin with, and we're back to talking about being affected.

*The Matrix* positions humans (or that which becomes human) much like nuts in a pie – intact, able to be thought of and about, able to be affected and effected, and constantly juxtaposed against some environment, the rest of the filling in our pie, perhaps. But what if we aren't nuts? What if we are something less tangible, like glucose? Where do we exist then? Are some of us bonded while others remain floating? I am not enough of a chemist to be sure whether or not this is an apt metaphor, so let's go a bit more nuts: what if we were electrons? Given what quantum theory tells us of what electrons do, how they literally can be everywhere at once, though by "everywhere" I mean a circumscribed field of possibility (which, if nothing outside that field is possible, is *everywhere* for that electron), at least insofar as it requires an endeavor to locate them in a precise place before they come into being, then as an electron in a

pie, the only place we ever are is *possible* (or maybe *probable* is the better word). As glucose, we might be in the crust, we might be in the yummy blackberry filling. We might be in those invasive pecans (because honestly, I'm not sure pecans go with blackberry – but how did this even become a blackberry pecan pie?). We might be somewhere between, or shared by a few different molecules, a protein perhaps, some commonplace complex carbohydrate. Until we are *sought*, we simply exist as a *could-be*.

But Neo isn't a *could-be*.

Neo is the everything that *you can* (because he can, and there's our "pecan") be, insofar as you, as a consciousness, as that thing to be affected=>effected, can seize control of the Matrix, can learn the code, can locate yourself, for that is what the crew of the Nebuchadnezzar try to do: they locate people, at least those who have the *potential* to be "the one" (p. 2). Or maybe you locate your "self"? Or maybe, as a "self" to begin with, what you really do is exist for others to locate your body? Neo exists as Neo long before he is ever grafted back onto his physical body, the one that has been sitting in a vat of goo. He is not an electron awaiting location (and therefore, not an electron yet) – he already exists, in the Matrix itself, something that is "him" is already there. *The Matrix*, as suggestive as it is about the blinds that might exist on our windows of possibility, still posits a requisite individual seizure of that possibility, some awareness of it, and an ability to somehow liberate oneself; the conception of humans in *The Matrix* still rests on some kernel of essence, some consciousness and location for it, a "self", perhaps, presupposed even if disembodied, a one that becomes.

How do we suspend this presupposition, exist as possibilities, and remain aware at the same time? Is it possible to even engage that last sentence without some position of consciousness? Can you think about thinking from the 1<sup>st</sup> person without a 3<sup>rd</sup> person

appreciation of what that 1<sup>st</sup> person (you) *actually* is (are)? Or can you allow yourself to be haunted in the 1<sup>st</sup> person by an appreciation of consciousness from the 3<sup>rd</sup> person without a need to decide whether or not it is *true*, whether or not *you* actually exist? Neo knows he actually exists, and when in the Matrix, knows he exists “not here.” But I do exist here, here in the matrix. Why must I want to *be* Neo?

## NeoFight

I want some big book,  
Filled with skills,  
That I can plug into the back of my neck,  
Like Neo,  
So I can do anything.

I want a black leather suit  
And shades,  
Sleek and slippery,  
So I can walk in the nothing  
Something  
To spring forth into  
A karate-kicking swan diving anything,  
Able to smash and dodge,  
Shooting bullets of rebellion  
From the shiny gun I  
Conjured from this  
Air voltage,

This breathed potential.

I will land on the concrete  
And smash this city  
Like superman, only scratches  
On my black sunglasses, only scratches,  
"Rick rick, ricky dee ee,"  
Vibrating onto my  
Black vinyl soundtrack,  
One many and various,  
Because of that book I plug  
into the back of my head  
So  
I can  
Be anything.

Smash!  
Barely conscious I  
Dreams my body down,  
Spilled my guts and elbow grease but  
No Richter registered my Fall,  
No... signature... for this event  
In this context  
I was  
And almost am  
No longer I  
Try to remember the stake,  
Juicy like Cipher's,  
Though he knew the  
Code and could,  
Knew the handshake,  
Knew his freedom to remain  
Until he remained,  
While I tried to inhere  
In the space between my  
Flight and concrete.

Never bought that book,  
I guess  
My second hand  
(Left not right) price  
B(r)ought only  
Remote control.

**Broken**

Heal me,  
Fix me,  
Put me in place.

I need me a(f)  
Fix  
-tion,  
Affection,  
Effection.

My eye is  
A fixing, afflicting  
In place.

Aye, an' I  
Stand(s)  
A-  
Fixed person,  
My Self.

### **Waking the Tiger (Levine, 1997)**

Peter A. Levine's book *Waking the tiger* (1997) articulates a conception of trauma and its treatment which honours a heavy connectivity between psychology and body. Levine describes a method he has developed over 25 years, one informed by "the fields of physiology, neuroscience, animal behavior, mathematics, psychology, and philosophy, to name a few" (p. 6), and one inspired by research that "echoes what ancient wisdom has always known: that each organ of the body, including the brain, speaks its own 'thoughts,' 'feelings,' and 'promptings,' and listens to those of all the others" (p. 2).

The body speaks. Perhaps it speaks of *us*, or what is done to it in the agony of *us*.

In my first-year biology course, I learned that animals (and so, humans included) had an instinctual fight-or-flight response that engaged when a threat presented itself. Let's bring to bear Butler's (2004) conception of bodies now and remember that it is the body that makes us available to the touch of the other, that makes us available to violence. And now let's think of "fight-or-flight" and instead of clarifying what it is, let's let it resonate, let it evoke what it evokes. Can you feel that "fight-or-flight?" Can you feel it between us? Let's rest here and let Levine carry us through his central image:

A herd of impala grazes peacefully in a lush wadi. Suddenly, the wind shifts, carrying with it a new, but familiar scent. The impala sense danger in the air and become instantly tensed to a hair trigger of alertness. They sniff, look, and listen carefully for a few moments, but when no threat appears, the animals return to their grazing, relaxed yet vigilant.

Seizing the moment, a stalking cheetah leaps from its cover of dense shrubbery.

As if it were an organism the herd springs quickly toward a protective thicket at the



wadi's edge. One young impala trips for a split second, then recovers. But it is too late. In a blur, the cheetah lunges toward its intended victim, and the chase is on at a blazing sixty to seventy miles an hour.

At the moment of contact (or just before), the young impala falls to the ground, surrendering to its impending death. Yet, it may be uninjured. The stone-still animal is not pretending to be dead. It has instinctively entered an altered state of consciousness shared by all mammals when death appears imminent....

...Physiologists call this altered state the "immobility" or "freezing" response. It is one of the three primary responses available to reptiles and mammals when faced with an overwhelming threat. (p. 15)

Levine goes on to describe the two reasons for the freeze response. One: it is a "last-ditch survival strategy" (p. 16) in that the cheetah may choose to store the supposedly dead impala for a later binge, and so will perhaps leave it unattended for a time, a time during which the impala may wake up and run to safety. Two: this frozen state is a painless state – the impala "will not have to suffer while being torn apart by the cheetah's sharp teeth and claws" (p. 16).

I never knew of this freezing, this stasis, never knew of a shut down, a slow down. Imagine if the world described by existential psychology: that we live with the knowledge of imminent death (Corey, 2001, p. 153), a knowledge that is supposed to inspire us to seize our freedom to choose in every moment, and to own responsibility for those choices and our lives (Corey, 2001, p. 151). What if it does not inspire? What if, in fact, the thought of death is very scary? What if, in fact, it is so scary that we are frozen by such knowledge, insulated to the pain of it? Does this imminence of death present with enough force to stimulate something like a freeze response? Perhaps I bleed the poetic a little too much here, but can Levine's freezing in

the face of death provide a poetic to generate possibilities about the placement that might occur in language? Are we caught by the “I”, placed with it, trapped by identity or the ever present need to know the definition of its particular constraint, frozen by the effort to know our “selves,” to know ourselves well?

Levine goes on to describe the potential problem of the freeze response:

The energy in our young impala’s nervous system as it flees from the pursuing cheetah is charged at seventy miles an hour. The moment the cheetah takes its final lunge, the impala collapses. From the outside, it looks motionless and appears to be dead, but inside, its nervous system is still supercharged at seventy miles an hour...what is now taking place in the impala’s body is similar to what occurs in your car if you floor the accelerator and stomp on the brake simultaneously....

A threatened human (or impala) must discharge all the energy mobilized to negotiate that threat or it will become a victim of trauma. (p. 20).

Levine finally describes that discharging this energy is something that can be physical. He claims that animals do it instinctively, while humans are less capable (p. 20). Levine describes a case in which he had a client perform a running motion during a therapy session, and what followed was a bout of vigorous trembling, one he indicates may be the reason for the client’s remarkable newfound freedom from the symptoms she had been experiencing. He explains that her physical discharge of energies from the “freeze” is what allowed her to become free her traumatic symptoms (p. 30).

I am not mentioning Levine’s theory for the purpose of authorizing it in any way, or using it to authorize anything else (though you may ask if I have not just done so). Rather, Levine’s idea for what happens during the experience of freezing, of stasis, provides a generative

poetic for exploring what might resonate in an agony of *us*, and the emergence of “I”, and of “self.” It is oddly resonant with an experiment I learned about in my first-year Psychology textbook:

Overmeier and Seligman (1967)... placed a dog in an apparatus in which it received electrical shocks that could not be avoided; nothing the animal did would prevent the shocks. Next, they placed the dog in another apparatus in which the animal received a series of trials in which a warning stimulus was followed by an electrical shock. In this case the animal could avoid the shocks simply by stepping over a small barrier to the other side of the apparatus. Dogs in the control group learned to step over the barrier and avoid the shock, but dogs that had previously received inescapable shocks in the other apparatus failed to learn. They just squatted in the corner and took the shock, as if they had learned it made no difference what they did. (Carlson, 1993, p. 368)

What happens when we can't run away from our “selves”, when we're not allowed to?

What happens when we're stuck with/in, a cage of identity?

**Seligman's Dog**

I am Seligman's dog

My acceptance is less  
Acquiescence  
Than stubborn hope  
Of silence and stillness,  
Than hatred as black as the cosmos.  
In time, it is  
Reflexive

It is the jellifying  
Possibility that  
I  
Deserve  
This.

It is the death creep,  
Slow,  
Towards  
Gratitude.

## Cage

Words are this cage,  
Seligman's cage.

Words that tell me how  
To think of myself, my  
Self, my  
Potential,  
My words  
And my truth of authenticity –  
Truth of truthness –  
These words  
All around me  
Trap me in place,  
Where I may look out through  
These words,  
Only  
These words,  
And know what I can be,  
What I could be,  
What my possibilities  
Are  
My imaginings,  
Anything I can imagine and  
Everything is imagined in these words,  
Inside these  
Words,  
My cage.

And the floor,  
Shocking pulse of you-stress to  
Actualize this  
Tendency,  
My tendency, or the tendency under me to  
Be,  
To be come,  
But I may come nowhere but here,  
For I am home already,  
Where I've ever been,  
So there's only a go

That I can go to,  
Through these words first,  
This,  
My cage of potential.

Is this my home?  
This shocking floor  
Arcs into my neck,  
My shoulders.  
I sleep here, and always have,  
For only through these words may I go,  
And as I do, they remain around me  
Caressing me with their echo of what  
I can be,  
Could be,  
Should be.

As I have words to  
Imagine my Self,  
Then at this "I" from which I imagine  
I can never actually *be* that Self,  
These words to poetry my Self  
Positioned inside this "I"  
Render always the Self I *can* be,  
Ever testifying to the eternity that  
Here,  
At this "I",  
I am

*Not.*

(yet)

Zap!

Actualization arcs through my shoulders  
As I sleep on my electric floor  
And perpetuate.

## Obedience

In first-year Psychology, I learned about the famous study on obedience that Stanley Milgram performed in 1963:

The subjects served as “teachers” in what they were told was a learning experiment. A confederate... serving as the “learner” was strapped into a chair “to prevent excessive movements when he was shocked,” and electrodes were attached to his wrist... The subjects were told that “although the shocks can be extremely painful, they cause no permanent tissue damage.” The subject was then brought to a separate room housing an apparatus with dials, buttons, and a series of switches that supposedly delivered shocks ranging from 15 to 450 volts in intensity. The subject was instructed to use this apparatus to deliver shocks to the learner in the other room. Beneath the switches were descriptive labels ranging from “Slight Shock” to “Danger: Severe Shock.” The learner gave his answers by pressing the appropriate lever on the table in front of him. Each time he made an incorrect response, the experimenter told the subject to throw another switch and give a larger shock.... The factor of interest was how long the subjects would continue to administer shock to the hapless victim. A majority of subjects gave the learner what they believed to be the 450-volt shock, despite the fact that he pounded on the wall twice and then stopped responding altogether. (Carlson, 1993, p. 600)

**Milgram**

Imagine, if you will,  
That Milgram used a one-way mirror,  
Or a bunch of them,  
And they all sat there  
In the in-between.

Imagine then, yourself,  
With fingers touching every dial,  
Little wrist twitches to amperes,  
Little flickers to denial.  
And every agonizing scream  
Emitting from the other side  
Reflected in that one-way glass:  
It's you inside,  
It's you inside.

And in that agony of current,  
As a subject, ask your Self  
What gives it license to send currents  
Arcing up your spine?  
And ask your Self  
Just who or what is standing in behind?  
Purity? Potential? Authenticity? Who might  
Stand now behind your Self  
And giving orders,  
As it were so authorized to do to you,  
To dial your pain  
Like it was right, like it was right?

Or flip it.  
Now you find yourself again  
Back on the safe side,  
And you know, now that  
You've read your textbook:  
All that torture is a lie.  
And watch yourself pretend to scream,  
Pretend to suffer, squirm and hate.  
And wonder at your place in this.  
And wonder at how you've been placed.

## Snap

I remember sitting in the chair. I didn't want to go to sleep – wasn't tired, and it's hard to sleep when you're terrified. Terror is an amazing experience. Forget fear – terror isn't fear, terror is a fear so bad that you don't even know you're afraid, especially when there's nothing to pin it on. Sort of like an anxiety attack – you have these funny symptoms that you sort of “know” are happening to you, but for some strange reason you have this fuzziness, this blurriness, that prevents you from totally feeling them. Like you're disembodied, one half-step a ghost, like someone kicked you so hard you half fell out of your body.

So, though you hear your heart pounding, thumping, whacking, you barely feel it and wonder then why your hearing is a bit dull and underwater. And then you hear his voice, and you know that your hearing is okay, and maybe you are underwater, though you're breathing. You go to move and feel like your arms are so much tingling sand. Or maybe it's just that you didn't actually move and only felt the thought of movement, like thoughts of motion are all you have left to exercise since you're only half connected to your body anyway. The out-of-control ghost who just sits.

Sit, rover, sit. Good dog.

That is terror – Seligman's dog had no idea what has happening – it was all so crazy it became normal. Terror is a kind of acceptance that is very hard to grasp, and fighting it is like the waking from a falling dream: “it wasn't real.” You survive terror through denial, and denial can be a hard thing to muster when everything that's happening to you seems to somehow fit.

“Snap out o fit,” he'd say, and slap the arm of his chair.

Whack!



I was honoured that he sat right beside me, but so ashamed that he had to be. All the other people had dutifully gone out to the balcony to sleep, but I couldn't. I felt too sick, and that scared me. When I was two I had the flu and aspirated on my own vomit. I was hospitalized for a week, and it wasn't very pleasant. So the thought of throwing up was very scary indeed, and I didn't want to leave my chair, didn't want to move. I couldn't escape that sore feeling of anticipation, like my body was so much Velcro, and even moving in my chair caused a ripping and stretching sensation. Or I was the muscle, and the chair was the skeleton, and every move I made was one nasty stretch – I was a perpetual charley horse. I did not want to move. I was so ashamed.

“Snap out of it!”

Whack!

Back to reality. At least he wasn't screaming. There was this tone in his voice that you could find somewhere, somewhere just under his screaming gale and ice blue eyes:

### **Gale**

You are a gale to me,  
Puffed up and ugly,  
A threat of rain that will whip  
Sideways.  
Your words flying by  
Blurring the distant mountains,  
Eroding the skin of  
My face.  
Tell me who I am:  
Put me in my place.  
I will not fall.  
You push.  
I will not fall.

You push.  
And I will not fall.  
I stand  
And erode into my effigy  
Or I will be  
Blown from my stony skin:  
I will be a haunting,  
Known for who I am  
While I moan  
Softly, silently,  
In the  
Eye  
Of your hurricane.

Soft, a childlike and laughing tone, warm and mischievous, always seemed to lurk there under his arctic wind words. It was hard to find though. It was gold when you did. Heaven actually.

Like I had been blessed. Maybe I had? I was on my way – Heaven, here I come, for he laughed when I spoke, and I had found the light.

“Snap out of it!”

Whack!

Not a yell, but not laughter. There we were, on those old fifties-style office chairs. Black vinyl seats, stainless steel coated frame, and varnished wood hand rests. Whack on the hand rest. Every whack, I’d slowly numbly cast my eyes downward to the hand rests, and I’d stare at wood grain. Flowing, streaming, moving – perpetually moving. Everyone else was happy and sleeping, and here I was sick on this chair, with him forced to sit beside me, perpetually un-yelling not-laughing, with moving armrests, flowing moving armrests.

“Snap out of it!”

Whack!

And that wood grain was ants. Carpenter ants. They lived in the wood, we had been told, and they were a problem. Nobody said anything about killing them – killing anything was a sin here, but that was okay, because that was something I was proud to uphold, something that made me feel good, special. Long ago I had used a magnifying glass to fry ants on the sidewalk. I got bored with it and switched to freezing them with ice cubes. I remember this one ant that seemed to get stuck to the cube. Or maybe I had smushed his hind parts into it. I don’t know. I remember the pathetically wiggling legs. Somehow, somehow, that vague motion told me of the cruelty and pure horror I had just inflicted. That poor ant. I remember that one ant only, and I have never done that again.

“Snap out of it!”

Whack!

Every whack: a shock in the desert. My legs are sand but I slowly, pathetically try to move them more underneath me, semi-cross legged on the seat since those carpenter ants are crawling down the walls by the thousands, across the be-speckled granite of that large chimney mantle, I already feel them seeking to crawl up my ankles. Tickle prickle. I watch them in sandy horror, follow the direction of their movement; they seem to be moving as quick as my eye can wander. They are at the edge of the mantle, on the carpet. Closer on the carpet. Closer on the carpet. God they're right underneath me. Move my legs. Wait, are those my legs? I barely feel them. But every move I sense in my hip, my toe, seems to resonate sharply in my heart, or my gut – can't tell which. Like that's the only place I can feel anything anymore, and only because through this numbing sand I somehow know that the reason I feel anything is because I am spiking spiking spiking electricity in that gut – my feeling currents, current feelings, should I not be so numb, would be knocking me out.

“Snap out of it!

**WHACK!**

Spike! Was that louder!? Oh god. Look in his eyes. He's mad, but not mad. I can't tell. Where's the gale?! Where's it gonna come from!? But the ants are back on the chimney. Are there less of them now? I can't tell. No, they're on the carpet again! Oh god! Wait – no their on the chimney. Ice blue eyes! Ants!

**WHACK!**

No need to say anything anymore, I'm well trained. Good dog.

Whack!

Was that right away? Was that softer? Is this breeze gentler than I thought? How much time is passing anyway? I'm feeling a bit drowsy – maybe that's the numbness? Ya maybe, I

can move my fingers without spiking my heart – I wonder what that was all about. Have I been asleep? That's a speckled granite chimney over there. A blank white carpet. Was there something I was afraid of here?

I look up and to my left where he sits. In fact, I remember that he has not been there the whole time, has come and gone, sat and left. Other people are coming in off the porch. Not everyone, but a few. That was a short nap for them.

He is up and to my left, looking relaxed, eyes half shut, always serious. He is... deliberate. Maybe he touched me to reassure me? I don't know. I hope so. I wanted him to. Wanted him to so badly.

I was afraid of something. Ants. Why oh why did I have to brave these ants? Their fire, their stinging bite. It is quiet now. I feel relaxed. He is relaxed. This must be good for me. I did not know about sodium amytal. All I knew was that this was going to help me know myself better. It was good for me. I was twelve years old.

## After Thoughts

Excerpt from a journal entry, dated February 16, 2006:

*I am amazed, but not surprised, at the intensity of my response as I finish that last sentence. I have spent the last five to ten minutes sobbing. It is a body response, a body sob. I know because I only start after I realize that I'm out of breath because I've been holding it to the point of fatigue. Like I'm afraid of how strong it's going to be when it comes out. As a kid, god – even as an adult, I'm still afraid of vomiting. Bucket loads and bucket loads. Shame speaks in silence, does it not?*

*But I have learned to find safe places. My room, door shut. A pillow. Perhaps to suffocate the cry. No – to dampen it. This is my pain, and my shame, and I will possess it in silence, honour it that way. I do not need the acknowledgment of others, the witnessing of others, to make it real. Indeed, for me, that very witnessing is the condition of my lack of ability to own it myself. What right have I to this body when it may only be acknowledged in the eyes of others? Or is this about rights at all? Is this body, indeed, mine? If not, is my silence some attempt to possess? Is such possession an instance of ownership, or is it something more demonic, and is there even a difference? What possesses my body? Do(es) I? Perhaps I do possess this body even as it carries that which is “me,” my “I”, in that possession. And in such moments as this, my body speaks for itself – I speak my shame, my experience, my silence, my pain, and in so doing, I am here, in my room, alive, wide-eyed, and witness enough. This body bears my testimony, and so only I may witness what haunts it.*

*You may ask: “If that’s the case, why are you writing about this?” I don’t rightly know. I know that there is a soothing in what I have done, but I have also been writing, bespeaking your presence: we truth for each other, soothe each other. But I did not intend for this to happen.*

*I did not sit down this morning to write about all this, but I began to. I think I was really just interested in the drama of saying "I was twelve years old" at the end of a story that could easily be about an adult, a story that is much more shocking when you realize it wasn't. Really, I had an almost gleeful desire to evoke the drama. But as I wrote, I went back there. But I didn't even know it until the last line. So, looks like I shocked myself.*

*I guess that's what I wanted – that shock value – and that is why I am writing. Not because I need a witness. Because I refuse to believe that I am the only person bearing and baring such terror and shame for what I have been through, for what I house "within." There must be others who have had experiences where terror and intimacy have become lovers, and who wonder how they're still alive, how they carry on afterwards. What they carry on afterwards. Where. I have learned the where. In my body. Not "in" like my body is a container for some "self." No – "in" in the sense of saturation: an embodied articulation/ position. I do not believe in a "self" that exists housed within my body, and gladly dance aside rhetoric that seeks to reconcile the two concepts via an idea of relationship. For even in relation, they are distinct things relating, and I wonder at the use of that distinction. It makes it very easy to justify abuse when my body, that five or six centimetres of flesh and bone, becomes so much a meat shield encasing what is valuable within, protecting, trapping. That is that locus of sand, that feeling of numbness.*

*No, I want to commit to my body, commit to its impulse to speak; my body articulates (in both senses of that word), sobs, moves. And it is not without danger. I am tired now, tired of writing this, tired of sobbing, fatigued, and there are things I want to do today, but I feel like sleeping. Is this the numbness? I don't know. There was a lot of energy here. It is a mystery to me how, in writing this, I might possibly channel this energy – dissipate it – because the writing,*

*by being writing, echoes from now unto an eternity of bespoken relation. I have written! These words, this, my remembrance, echoes. How can writing channel when it necessarily archives and embeds in such a permanent way? By writing, do I flirt with becoming stranded in my own remembrance, alone and ever remembering? Perhaps the letters store this energy like a chemical bond, sitting, resting, remaining, awaiting rupture in reading, awaiting your presence.*

*There goes my phone. I don't answer. I listen to the message. It's my sister inviting me over to watch hockey. I phone her back, and suddenly realized how badly I want to talk to her about what I have just re-experienced and felt this morning. Maybe I do need a witness after all. Or perhaps I just need someone else to help bear it all, in and after the baring. Perhaps I just yearn for some acknowledgment of the plurality upon which I, my "I", must rest, a plurality by which my body, in being given over to the touch of others, allows for the very autonomy from which "I" write this rite right now.*

*I'm so glad she called.*

## Practice Player

I remember doing a bit of visualization in one of my Bantam years of hockey (when I was fourteen or fifteen years old). I was one of those “practice players,” a guy who excelled in practice but kind of faded away during a real game, “real” in the sense of, “a game played against a competitor when the results counted,” or some such thing. Hockey is always real to some extent. Funny how that’s possible: to *always* be real *to some extent*. Gimme a game of *shinny* any day – so much fun to play when it really doesn’t matter.

So much easier when it doesn’t matter, or when what *could be* matters more.

We trained in how to make the possible real. We visualized. I remember being told not to visualize myself as if from a distance, not to watch myself. No, the key to visualizing is to conjure in your mind what it will look like *from your point of view, from behind your eyes* in your desired moment of potential success. So watching myself perform the “Savardian Spin-orama,” like I was watching it on TV, or from the stands, like I was appreciating the grace of the movement, the pirouette on a dime, the befuddled look on the defenseman’s face, the elegance of how the puck trickles through my own legs even as I spin only to find that it has landed on my stick again, ten feet to the right of where I’d started, and opposite the direction I had originally been going in, watching myself do that from a distance was out, no matter how graceful it might seem.

In hockey, seeming isn’t scoring.

Truly visualizing meant seeing the defenseman’s skates align slightly to my left as I cross the blue line, as I watch the blue line slide knowingly under my skates. It meant seeing the other side of the rink as I glance up and left, meant *feeling* my body weigh into my stick, feeling my wrists open the blade of my stick, feeling myself look up as if to pass over there in the hope that



I'd suckered this guy into believing my feint. Visualizing meant *knowing* that he had bitten, meant seeing through the corner of my right peripheral vision his commitment to sever me from the puck, to put his shoulder into my chest and send me sprawling to the ice. Visualizing meant knowing this with *glee*, and feeling myself react instantly to that knowledge, a subtle flick of my wrists sending the puck between my feet just as I shift to my right foot while I turn it inward with a quick scrape, push off and shift to the other foot as it turns outside my body and I spin counter clockwise, stick in the air, vision black (for I close my eyes), neck craning, feeling the weight on my left skate and the solid "tock" of the puck on the backhand of my blade as I whip it down to the ice at just the right moment. I see the backside of the defenseman from the left corner of my peripheral vision now, his hips twisting to recover from committing to the wrong direction, and I watch him get ever so smaller as I, in a heartbeat, gain an ever-so-precious three feet of distance with my immediate one-two push, the quick twitch step of a left winger on the right side of the ice. And I am in my favorite place on the ice now. We call it the "quiet zone." I am the quiet sniper with a black rubber bullet.

I glance up. I see the goalie now, all alone as I glide in dangerously at a 30 degree angle – not the best for scoring, but mind you, the slot is empty and I'm a quicker than many. And I see him, now. He's playing the poke-check. He's mine. Feel my left shoulder fake on the backhand, the quick cut and step, puck back to forehand as the goalie lays out, my wrists wide and out and searching around his outstretched stick, searching through the slot, reaching for a glimpse of the far post in this slow split-second. And now, nothing but the yawning cave to put it in, I slide puck along the ice - no need to put it upstairs, just in case it goes too high. Someone, somewhere, just said:

*He shoots...*

You'd be surprised how many times you don't score when there's nothing to stand in your way. And its amazing how failure haunts the prospect of guaranteed success: for this is my visualization, and still I wrestle with my focus to make sure that I see the puck hitting the bargain basement of the net with that ugly "clank" that is the net base, an ugly clank that sends euphoria into my arms long before I could ever think to, throws them up for me while I raise my head and

streeeeeeeeetch

(this moment) to

catch up to myself.

*He Scores!*

Then I get smashed from behind by some idiot defenseman just for kicks.

When you visualize, you put yourself there. You don't put your "self" there, for the minute you have objectified your "self", you are watching it all from the stands. Your "self" does the Spin-o-rama, your "self" dances around the defensemen. Your "self" makes that lightning quick crafty move and fake. It gets smashed, scores, and lies smiling on the ice in a heap of glory. And you watch from the stands.

But sometimes you visualize properly and  
real-eyes

your potential, lie in that heap of glory on the ice, wondering if, perhaps, there's a reason you can't wiggle your fingers, wondering why it is that you haven't gotten up yet, why your coach's face is looking down on you, why you just heard the referee say "someone call 9-1-1" even as his voice gets fainter. Wondering, perhaps, at the blackness, and where has your vision gone anyway? Why can't I see? What's happening?

**Unsafe**

It is not safe,  
The place  
From which *I wish*  
To realize -eyes  
Potential  
Lies  
Behind my eyes.

And I am always  
Right here  
When I'm  
There.

## Crack

Crack! Pow!  
 Feel the ice now  
 Ripping cracking lightning under foot,  
 Stick reaching up  
 Like a lightning rod,  
 Action courses through your thunder heart,  
 You stand at the edge of courage,  
 On some mountain of potential,  
 The chaos winds on your eyelids,  
 Teaching you what it is to see.

You stride jump and fly.  
 Crack!  
 Struck!  
 Burnt from the inside,  
 Some lived explosion,  
 Coursing forth  
 Your own big bang,  
 Your universe of black.

The sea was black, oily waves rolling listlessly to crash with indifference on rocks so sterile that even moss did not grow on them.

“What do you see?” came the distant voice.

Nicholas struggled to speak, and at last he found his voice. “Failure.”

“Failure?”

“Complete and utter failure. Nothing survives.”

“Then go there!” ...

Immediately he was out on the blasted plain, and the mournful sound of the lifeless waves rang in the still air. “Where do I go?” he asked the dead sky.

“Where do you wish to go?”

(Feist, 1994, p. 158-159)

## Dammed

My destruction is mine  
 Until accorded the value  
 Of "experience"  
 In learning -  
 It is then for you  
 And all my energy  
 Taken.  
 My body heavy,  
 I rubber through this "dead-sky"  
 Breathing this propaganda  
 Of "effort" even as I fatigue  
 From my lack of it,  
 Even as I sleep, a waking  
 Waking  
 In my wake.

In this endowed voltage,  
 My circuit broken,  
 You(')r(e) breaker,  
 A possessive existential apostrophe,  
 For ever am I potential,  
 And thereby, grounded  
 Against the threat of explosion.  
 My current may not  
 Race in the chaos,  
 Carouse the brows of those  
 Beside me,  
 Marking them in blood  
 As witness.

No.  
 I am accorded potential,  
 Accorded effort, living  
 Grounded, controlled.  
 I wait drowsy,  
 A ponderous "black, oily" lake.  
 Suspended.  
 Dammed.

***Life of Pi* (Martel, 2001)**

Martel's (2001) stunning work, *Life of Pi*, well serves as a pivotal narrative for eying my "self". And, given that this thesis is a narrative inquiry into language, language about language, it is fitting that the story of Pi is itself the story of a story: the narrator is Pi, but the writer is Martel who presumably has interviewed Pi, and so the text is Martel's account of Pi's narration of his own journey through the vast Pacific after the sudden and crazy sinking of a Japanese transport ship, the very one upon which he and his family (with their many exotic animals - his father owned a zoo) were attempting to emigrate to Canada.

Pi relates a tale in which he finds himself stranded in a life-boat with a hyena, a hurt zebra, and Richard Parker, the zoo's Bengal Tiger. Pi must harness the wisdom he has gleaned from growing up in a zoo in order to manage the interaction of these animals on this precarious perch of survival. He must endure the elements, find a way to feed himself, find a way to feed the animals, and not get eaten himself, and he must exist solely for the hope that one day, of the many days that all seem to be the same, he will be discovered. Pi lives on the very tip of the tarpaulin-covered lifeboat, surrendering the rest of the territory to the animals, and their ensuing conflicts. He must watch and learn as the hyena eats the zebra alive and eventually kills her, as an orangutan on a floating boat of bananas joins the small crew only to be subsequently killed by the hyena, as a blind French cook meets them and tries to kill him, and as Richard Parker, after having claimed the underside of the very tarp upon which Pi lives, emerges to destroy every other living thing on the boat except the little Indian boy. How can Pi live with Richard Parker now that the tiger has emerged from the dark place beneath him and claimed the boat? How will the two of them survive together?

The book pivots in Part 3, in which Pi is asked by some Japanese investigators to tell the story of his lonely 227 day journey across the Pacific aboard the sole surviving life raft. He presumably tells the story that we have just read, and the investigators flat-out disbelieve him. “Hard to believe?” he answers, “What do you know about hard to believe?” (p. 329), exclaiming: “If you stumble at mere believability, what are you living for? Isn’t love hard to believe?” (p. 330). Pi is no fool, and figures out what the investigators really want to hear:

I know what you want. You want a story that won’t surprise you. That will confirm what you already know. That won’t make you see higher or further or differently. You want a flat story. An immobile story. (p. 336)

“Here’s another story,” (p. 336) he continues, relating a shorter tale in which he becomes everything which he, in his young life, had come to reject with his whole soul: a meat-eater, a murderer, a cannibal. The investigators put it all together:

“His stories match.”

“So the Taiwanese sailor is the zebra, his mother is the orang-utan, the cook is...the hyena – which means he’s the tiger!”

“Yes. The tiger killed the hyena – and the blind Frenchman – just as he killed the cook.” (p. 346)

Richard Parker is Pi. Or rather, he is that part of Pi that is called upon in times of violence, in times when Pi must do things he abhors. If you read *Life of Pi* a second time, you begin to find all the sentences that ambiguously allude to Richard Parker’s duality, his existence as a tiger and as Pi himself, the narrator of that very existence. We are presented with the power of story, but not story as something grafted onto existence in language, words, poetry, etc., but rather story *as* existence, and yet *within* existence at the same time, a mechanic that resonates

with the way Butler's (2004) human is both a simile and that which bears it. And the setting for this story oddly resonates of a darker conception of *potential*, for here's a tale in which a little boy is trapped on the pacific ocean, a field of infinite potential in that every direction is open to him, but a field in which he is nonetheless (or arguably: consequently) trapped.

There were many skies.... There were many seas.... And in between the two, in between the sky and the sea, were all the winds. To be a castaway is to be a point perpetually at the centre of a circle.... When you look up, you sometimes wonder if...there isn't another one like you also looking up, also trapped by geometry, also struggling with fear, rage, madness, hopelessness, apathy. (Martel, 2001, p. 238)

Pi is in stasis, trapped by sheer openness, and he must survive the very real threat that such openness begets: exposure. And he succeeds; he succeeds by drawing on the skills he has learned in his young life and combining them with the courage to live in a way that is somehow inauthentic, that is so very counter to who he believes himself to be. He becomes Richard Parker, and kills and eats to survive. And as we learn that the grown-up narrator Pi is a very nurturing and gentle man, we are also aware of the haunting loss he feels for the absence of Richard Parker.

When we reached land.... I let myself down the side. I was afraid to let go, afraid that so close to deliverance, in two feet of water, I would drown. I looked ahead to see how far I had to go. The glance gave me one of my last images of Richard Parker, for at that precise moment he jumped over me... He passed directly in front of me on his way to the right. He didn't look at me. He ran a hundred yards or so along the shore before turning in. His gait was clumsy and uncoordinated. He fell several times. At the edge of the jungle, he stopped. I was certain he would turn my way. He would look at me. He would flatten his ears. He would growl. In some such way, he would conclude our



relationship. He did nothing of the sort. He only looked fixedly into the jungle. Then Richard Parker, companion of my torment, awful, fierce thing that kept me alive, moved forward and disappeared forever from my life. (p. 315).

Though Richard Parker has disappeared forever, some hint of pain haunts this passage. Richard Parker never formally concludes the relationship, leaving us to consider that he might still be lingering, haunting Pi with his memory, his presence:

At times he gets agitated. It's nothing I say (I say very little). It's his own story that does it. Memory is an ocean and he bobs on its surface.... After all these years, Richard Parker still preys on his mind. (p. 46)

Richard Parker "preys" on Pi's mind. Pi is agitated. And it makes sense: Richard Parker is everything that Pi did not wish to be. He is hard to control. Perhaps his chaotic nature also bespeaks a difficulty of definition, for Richard Parker does not seem to care about how he is defined – he is simply there, visible:

"That's Richard Parker," he says.

I'm amazed. I look closely, trying to extract personality from appearance.... Richard Parker his looking away. He doesn't even realize that his picture is being taken. (p. 96)

In the same passage, Pi relates how it feels to live with the loss of his mother:

"The worst of it," he says, "is that I can hardly remember what my mother looks like any more. I can see her in my mind, but it's fleeting. As soon as I try to have a good look at her, she fades. It's the same with her voice. If I saw her again in the street, it would all come back. But that's not likely to happen. It's very sad not to remember what your mother looks like."

He closes the book. (p. 97)

I find it interesting that the capture of Richard Parker (in a photograph) occurs in the same passage as Pi's mourning. Does this illustrate something about identity and relation? Richard Parker, in all his irreverent and hard-to-control glory, is still a facet of Pi's identity and so perhaps, if we consider Butler (2004), may rest on a "we" of some sort. In this case, perhaps this "we" is Pi's relationship with his mother, the person who bore Pi's physical body before he did, or rather, before he was then borne by it. And so Richard Parker, that manifestation of Pi that is hardest for him to reconcile into his own identity concept, remains that which brings Pi closest to who he loved most, and the very one who brought him to life.

Does the loss of someone haunt us because it gives us a glimpse into how we do and undo each other? And what happens when we are isolated, especially if that isolation is the fruit of this very thing "identity," of this story of who and what we are that cannot be flexible, or that necessarily rests with us alone, on some sea of potential? What happens when we have the courage to live in ways that are not congruent with our "selves"? What happens when we have the courage to live inauthentically? Pi's remembering offers much more than an account of the magic of story and identity. It offers us a possibility for how such things exist and beget themselves, suggesting that perhaps story and identity speak less of anything intrinsically true as much as they may speak of moments of stasis, of location, of positioning, moments that must be survived, and eventually, shaken off, cast off, remembered. And that this process is not necessarily easy, that it might require courage, that it might require doing things, being things, that one finds hard to contain, that it might leave scars.

In the Chinese zodiac, the tiger symbolizes, among other things, courage. I was born in 1974, a year of the tiger. In this thesis, you have read my rememberings of my own pacific ocean. Now meet my tiger.

## Drop Pass

I was sixteen, and we were trapped in our end, the fore-check was solid and constant, and we were getting tired. The puck squirted loose in the opposite corner to me. Feet flash and I'm gliding backwards to my side of the rink along the half boards, offering the outlet pass for our defenseman who just jumped on the puck and was skating with it behind our net towards my side of the ice.

No pass, and he's getting closer. Up, feet, up! One-two-three strides and I'm skating right at him. This is called a "cross." He will skate behind me towards where I was, while I move in the opposite direction and curl up ice. If the pressure goes to him, he can pass to me. If the pressure stays with me, he has room to skate the puck up the boards.

But he gives me a quick pass right away, which is a nice move since I am moving with momentum in the opposite direction. We have not crossed just yet, so I start curling up the ice with the puck now. But I'm in the middle of our zone right in front of our net, so I need an outlet. If the pressure goes to me, I can drop the puck behind, laying it in front of my defenseman as we cross paths so he can pick it up and continue up the boards. Many coaches will tell their players to just get the puck out of the zone. I had momentum, and probably could have just shot the puck off the far boards and out, or flipped it high over the other team's heads and into the centre. But in this particular play, if all the pressure comes to me (because I'm in such a vulnerable position in our defensive end), then if I drop the puck onto my defenseman's stick, he will have the whole side boards to skate – an open lane virtually all the way out of the zone. If our far winger is smart, we'll have a nice offensive transition.

It's a gorgeous play, the cross. The pattern the players skate looks like drawing two intersecting "c"-s on the ice. You hear the "crack snap crack" of both players' skates as they do

crossover turns to generate momentum. The puck barely moves, but is placed with perfect timing on one player's stick just as he gets speed, and suddenly the two of you are moving with speed, with the puck, and the other team is on their heels. It's beautiful.

And, sure enough, the pressure goes to me.

So I drop the puck.

Unfortunately for me, my defenseman was well coached. He was thinking I'd just dump the puck out. The last thing he was expecting was a drop pass, so he missed it. And because I dropped it, suddenly, there's a free puck sitting behind me, five feet in front of our goalie, on my side of the ice, and the pressure that was on me is in a prime position to pick that puck up. In the time I've taken to write that sentence, all the rest of this has already finished.

Crack! Great shot for the short top corner.

Thunk! Nice save!

Tweet! That's the whistle. Face off. Whew. Wipe my brow. That was close.

But it's not over. On the bench I get an earful from the assistant coach (the head coach isn't at the game tonight). And he won't stop. Over and over about how it was a stupid play and what was I even thinking? So I keep muttering my responses, saying it was a good play, that the D guy should have been ready, that you always support your pass. I'm the team captain, and it is hard on team cohesion when the captain is arguing with the coach in front of the players. But he's wrong about this, or maybe I am, and it no longer matters as we go back and forth on the bench, me under my breath, he over my head as we all stare out at the ice. Bad play, good play, stupid play, D should support, don't be an idiot, *you're* the idiot.

Yank!

Suddenly I'm being lifted from behind by the scruff of my jersey. He has grabbed me with both hands, and is forcibly lifting me out of the bench while I scramble a bit in shock trying to keep my skates on the ground (he is standing on the bench behind me, so he has some leverage). He throws me out of the bench, "you're done tonight, Yakimov."

Now I have never, *ever* talked back to a coach. Not even under my breath. I have always been very "coachable," have always held a captaincy position on the competitive teams I have played on, I know deeply the importance of respecting the coach, of maintaining discipline and dedication, of sticking to the game plan. A confrontation here, or a further one, was just not acceptable.

I am a leader.  
 I am respectful.  
 I am humble.  
 I am level-headed.  
 I am disciplined.  
 I do what I'm told for the good of the team.  
 I have always been a good captain.  
 I have always *been* a good captain.

*I am* the team captain.

But what he did was no longer acceptable. I could not tell you why, and I could not tell you why it might be unacceptable right then. Everything that I was no longer mattered. I no longer mattered insofar as how "I" might be described from this point forward, for the point that mattered now was my view: my point of view, and what took place just behind my eyes, not my "I" or any plurality. Something just shot out from my tarpaulin-covered life boat.

"Fuck you!"

When the game was over, I informed him that if he did not leave the team, I would. The next practice while we were dressing, the head coach came in.

“Hold on you guys,” he says, “I have an announcement.” He looks pissed. “I don’t know how *some* of you thought of Joe, but he has decided that it was not highly enough for him to remain a part of the team. So it’s just me now. I hope you’re happy.”

I was.

We didn’t make the playoffs.

## High Sticking

Imagine, if you will, that you are looking through some one-inch Plexiglas, that you are sitting, perhaps in the third row, perhaps the fourth, or maybe even the bleachers. The angle of this view is less important than the look itself, or the looking, the calling of this ice rink into this now that exists on the crest of this cursor, in the wake of these letters, waking.

We just dumped it in. Billy rang it along the back boards with a snapper. A couple of quick strides and I set myself in my tracks, waiting to make fractional adjustments in my timing so that I hit that puck, or that defender (whichever comes first) hard and effectively.

Good goalie. Reads the play. Quick step and he's behind the net stopping the dump. Their D grabs the puck from a few strides in front of Billy (who's com'n in hard now) and he dances around the net, letting a pass go to the half-boards. I adjust to fore-check, but the winger there has good hands: touch pass just behind me, and to the guy that was back-checking me.

Like whales in the ocean, we all

Curl.

Goin' the other way now. I'm in reach of the guy, and he hasn't released the puck. One stride, I can touch him with my stick. I tug on his top elbow with my stick, but he shakes it off. Tug again, hook, tug, hook,

Smack!

That was the blade of my stick ringing of the side of his helmet near his face. And the puck no longer matters now, for his whole body changes over the course of

One  
Long  
Second.

Straightens up. Arms down to his sides. Turns to glide backwards to face me. Eyes on fire. Mouth clenched. "Are you fucking kidding me?" he says. I say nothing. "You stupid fuck, that's my eye."

I duck my eyes, mutter "sorry man."

"Sorry?" You dumb shit – this is rec. hockey! We all gotta work tomorrow! What are you thinking?"

I say nothing. I look in his eyes, look down. I take it. I haven't realized it, but I've

Matched his speed, his coast up the ice.  
My body has straightened,  
My arms hanging down.  
I am standing up, gliding,  
Awaiting the need to make,  
Fractional adjustments.  
Unable to move until  
He  
Releases me.

It was completely accidental. I had no intention of even coming near his face. Bad timing in that my stick was where it was when he tried to shrug it free. I was in control of my stick. But really, are you ever in complete control? In the end, it's not my fault in the sense that I never *intended* for this to happen. But really, of course it's my fault: who ever intends to high-stick someone? I did it. I just put someone's eye at risk because he was faster than me. What does it mean to have an excuse in this situation? What does it mean to want one? I wanted one.

"You idiot."

I am marked. Judged. Done. Someone has done me, me the guilty, the idiot. Is my life livable now? I never got his forgiveness. It is something I will have to live with. Perhaps he has forgotten? Perhaps he has forgiven? But I will never know. There is a "mark" upon this "self" of mine now, and I will have to live with it. I am no longer pure. I will have to accept gifts, be



loved, be looked up to, be thought of highly, with this mark of non-forgiveness. One I bear alone. Or do I? No, one I bear for him, for in that bearing I recognize that I may have blinded him for no good reason. I did that. Me. I. Did that.

Can I forgive myself? No – that would, in a sense, say that it was okay, right? Isn't that how we forgive? "That's okay." Of course my life is still livable, but it was not okay. There's no going back to that moment now. Any preceding purity is shattered, fragmented like contexts, and I emerge in this new one, an "idiot." Will he forgive me? What am I seeking then? Were I to engage in the process of tracking this man down to secure a "hey that's alright, man," to secure some erasure of this blemish, what would happen should he decide not to grant my wish? We live with a burden of purity in those times when forgiveness is the license we await before we continue. Is it possible to live when someone else doesn't respect you? Is it possible to feel like you *deserve* to live when someone else, perhaps, thinks you don't? Is this ever not contentious? All I did was high-stick this guy. And perhaps he has forgotten, perhaps he has not. But I have not. And perhaps I do not have to in order to remain, in order to continue. I remember.

I stand on my edges,  
Edge of shame,  
Edge of courage,  
Poised.

He slowly turns away  
My knees bend a little  
He shakes his head  
I take a stride.  
These moments might move onward now.

He will not drop his gloves this time. And I am glad – I didn't want this fight, even though it might be said that I asked for it. I will have to body check him later. Perhaps dangle around him with the puck and make him feel useless. Perhaps score the winning goal and crush

his pride. I will have to do all these things because that is what I am trying to do on this ice –  
play this hockey game, score goals, own them. And that is what I want to do.

Afterwards,  
I will have to drive home,  
Stop at stoplights,  
Use my turn signals,  
Go the speed limit... or not.  
I will have to walk in the door.

I want to tell her I love her.  
I want to hear it back.  
I will have to take it, if it's given.  
I will have to take it.

## First Great Goal

It still rests in my sister's basement, all covered in shadows and spider webs, the sucked out carapaces of dozens of unsuspecting wood bugs, bathing in the scent of basement memories and things too precious to throw away, too old to resurrect. My Koho fiberglass-laminated "twig." I remember taping the thing. Back then, it wasn't social suicide to deviate from the traditional black or white tape. So this one sported a pink top grip, and a two-foot solid strip of orange tape on the shaft so I wouldn't lose my grip taking third period slap shots, hands covered in that gooey afterbirth of leather and sweat.

But I never really took 'slappers' that much. You need a lot of intent to take a slap shot. When I taught at hockey school, the slap shot mantra was "this is the most powerful shot you can take, and also the least accurate, so if you really want to score, maybe pick a different option." To truly make use of the shot, you need an iron-born determination to make that puck fly as fast as it possibly can and a pin-sharp focus on exactly where it must go. Every muscle is taught in your body while your neck relaxes so that your head can adjust from focusing on the puck just behind your forward foot, and then to your target. You swing down, a perfect arc, timing your flexion just as the stick hits the ice a couple of inches behind the puck. Those two inches are crucial, for as the stick crosses that small bit of space, your whole body weighs into it, flexing it like some Herculean bow, endowing it with a tension that is the avatar of your whole physical being, one that channels through the stick and into that puck as you sweep forward, your back leg coming up as your body weight transfers, shooting that puck forward like some comet shot from space, no thoughts for the wake of devastation it, you, leave behind. No thoughts.

It is a very hard shot to do well. The players that can do it well stand out. Once, when I was fifteen, I played briefly on a select team with a guy who would one day come to be a

superstar in the National Hockey League. As of this writing, he still plays, and is still considered a top scorer. I felt like I was in over my head in this tournament – so many players were bigger, better, did more, knew what to do. And this budding superstar decided once to wind up and take the least accurate shot in hockey from the offensive outside hash marks (a very tough angle) while he was in the middle of traffic. What kind of decision is that?

Crack!

He scored top shelf, short side.

You need a lot of intent to score. You need a lot of intent to take a slap shot. I didn't take slap shots very much.

The following September I started my first year of Midget hockey. A buddy of mine and I were the only first-year players to make the triple-A team that year. Two years ago, I had done the same thing and so I knew a lot of the older guys. But I had never really gelled much with them: I was the kid that could skate fast, and I worked hard, but I remained pretty well ineffective most of the time because I was so scared of all the bigger players. So, now that I was in first-year Midget and playing with the same group of older guys, it was a bit of a surprise for all of us when I scored on my first shift.

After the initial face off, the other team gained control and attacked our blue line.

Where's my check? Where's my check? Oh, there he is. Defense are playing them well, not much to do. Watch watch watch. Okay, our guy just got the puck and cleared it out of the zone. I can't reach that puck, but I'm gonna pressure. Move, feet, move. Move! That's better – you always know you're moving when the wind beats across your eyelashes like a pending gale. Their last defenseman has corralled the puck close to their own blue line. His back is to me, and

he's starting to turn back up the ice. He has no idea how fast I am, how close I have come. I'm already there. I'm already here.

That is my puck! He turns to his left. I come at him from his right, actually catching him up on the outside of his own turn. I lift his stick, grab the puck. Pull backwards as I turn backwards and then forwards again, a 180-degree pivot. Two strides, and I'm gone. He's nowhere in sight. Just me and the goalie. I'm a left-hand shot. Open the blade with a flick, like I'm going upstairs. Nice – he bit! Pull across to the backhand. He's flopping, so I 'shelf' it hard on the back-hand and upstairs it goes while I curl away, hands in the air. There had been no doubt in my mind that I would score.

On the bench, I hear from the top scorer on the team last year:

"Wow, Yakimov's really improved! That was awesome."

We sailed on to win 5-1. I assisted on another goal and finished with two points. I didn't take one slap shot. But I did claim that puck. I made a defenseman and a goalie both look silly and inept within a span of 6 seconds. I can still remember the puck snapping off the tip of my blade, I remember the orange tape under my already sweaty hand, I remember the pink hand grip at the top. My stick sits in my sister's basement. Dressed in the shadows of a kind of glory that is the foundation for the soul of any hockey player.

There is no "nice" in hockey. Standing on the edges of committed impulse in a game that allows you, requires you sometimes, to physically dominate or destroy another player, or to make them look absolutely useless, is not something that has much room for "nice." How can I stand on that edge, then, and think of myself as a "nice" guy? How does any truth about my identity stay within me if, in this place, I become something I aspire not to be, and love it? Does identity even inhere in me, or does it slip off and around me when I'm in my skates, much like

my tightening hand slips off the shaft of my untaped stick, lubricated by the sweat of their own exertions. Indeed, that pink and orange stick was given to me by a kid at the hockey school at which I once instructed, a kid who wanted my stick in return as a keepsake. For the hockey school's mandate was not like many other hockey schools: "To provide a positive growth experience." We aspired to not only teach hockey, but also to teach young hockey players what it meant to be a part of a team, to support each other, to listen to each other, to take care of each other, to consider each other. This kid had such an experience, and traded sticks with me to commemorate it. And I used that stick, used it to dominate another player.

How do I reconcile an identity that must house these things?

How can "I" contain them?

## The Calming of Richard Parker

I step onto the ice,  
Familiar cracks,  
Snapping edges of ice skates  
Bite down hard  
For their purchase  
With a currency,  
Familiarity.

Smell the carbon monoxide,  
The stale scent of damp wood,  
The cold bite of the rink's breath,  
The salt of my sweat  
On my tongue and my lips  
As I lick them against  
The constant danger of cracking.  
Even blood tastes familiar.  
Eyes water in the chill,  
Or are those my tears?  
Love and loss mingle here  
As I realize  
That for most of my life I've  
Felt more comfortable in ice skates  
Than shoes or bare feet,  
My soles grafted with edges  
On which I move faster, more deftly,  
More balanced and strong.  
In these skates I become  
So much more real  
Than anything else  
I could ever be.  
So purely electric, and  
So nothing  
Else.

Unlike Pi Patel,  
Perhaps  
I  
Was lucky.  
Conscious, aware, I  
Knew this was the pinnacle:  
I'd never be faster,  
I'd never be stronger,  
I'd never be more skilled than I was  
At this moment.

But there was no glory here,  
No blistering slapper,  
No devastating body check,  
No mind blowing dangle.  
No, this was a moment that spanned  
Maybe seconds,  
And Maybe I floated there,  
Suspended by a motion  
Lived without thought,  
Always,  
And I knew it  
Again then,  
And never again.

This rink, it's an oblong place,  
Bounded and hard and  
Containing the violence  
And beauty that happens  
In hockey.  
There is no escape for the  
Smaller of stature  
Save speed and pure balance,  
Commitment to impulse,  
The pumping of quick feet,  
The dancing aside  
From impending destruction,  
(Or not),  
With your eyes open wide  
Till they shut and remain so.

Richard Parker is with me  
Today as I write.  
He's older in ice skates,  
Not given to fight  
When he's in them.  
But I have discovered a pulse  
Of his quickening temper,  
His irreverent bearing,  
His brazen appearance,  
His soft spoken *prusten* (p. 180).  
That tiger, that courage,  
It's lurking between us,  
Awaiting in silence  
Between us, it lurks.





**Richard Parker**

I want to write like Ovetchkin!  
And live like a hurricane!  
Breathing destruction  
And gracefully dancing by  
Cracking and splitting  
The ice here, my surface potential,  
By charging and clapping  
My thunder of speed.  
There's no thought here,  
No time to consider,  
Just impulse of body,  
Commitment to give  
Over to it my heart  
Screaming nightmares  
Of agony, dangers of pain,  
And I ride in the wake of  
My waking existence on  
Edges of courage,  
My soul ever breaking.

## After Word

This has been a narrative inquiry into the language of “self,” as I have lived it and experienced it in many contexts. I have brought to bear thought by a number of scholars in this work, scholars who, perhaps, may have no real interest in my endeavor. In other words, their thought may not be completely relevant to an inquiry into the language of “self.” I have presented these ideas less to evidence any claim, and more to generate senses of what the language of “self” might do to us, how it might do us.

If I were to make any claim about my own experience, it would be that the single most liberating and healing set of considerations I have undertaken has been the challenge of living without needing to confirm any “self”, plural or otherwise. If I were to indicate a situation in which I believe a thesis such as this should be considered, it would be that moment when you first tell a young person to “be yourself.” Because it inspires the single most lonely question I can think of:

“But who am I?”

I believe this is a statement of being; it does not describe being, it *does* being, *does* lonely.

If the language of “self” is, indeed, something that simply *might* be more distressing than helpful for some people, it behooves us to begin probing it, working it, and wringing it to see what spills out. It behooves us to begin questioning when and how we use it so that we know when it is appropriate to leave it behind.

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