

INTRODUCTION

Before being so radically and purposely the gesture of Heidegger, this gesture was also made by Nietzsche and Freud, both of whom, as is well known, and sometimes in very similar fashion, put consciousness into question in its assured certainty of itself.¹

1. Truth, Fear, and Writing

Spinoza of course made this gesture before it could have been made.² Consciousness can no longer be certain of itself; and if it cannot now, then it never could have been. The difference between then and now, is that self-doubt is self-conscious at every level. Our obsessions here find their way into journals, letter-writing, e-mail communities, writing of all sorts.³ So much of what we write about in each case, is why we are writing. As “authors” become increasingly self-conscious about what they are doing, that is, as they become increasingly aware that they are writing and re-writing themselves in an effort to keep themselves in existence,⁴ philosophical writing increasingly chooses as its subject its own process.⁵ In my title I have juxtaposed writing with fear and with truth. The gesture toward fear must seem just a little odd; that toward truth, perhaps even quaint. My point is that we write because we are afraid of truth: sometimes

we write to overcome that fear, and in overcoming that fear we find something other than fear; other times we write to cover up the fear by obscuring the truth.⁶

There are two reasons I find the study of these relations important. First, I believe that the primary impediment to organized political action (revolution) is fear. We are afraid to form the requisite communities for political action because of brute counter force, of course, also, and importantly, because of the fear of discovering ourselves in this or that configuration. Who will we be? What will we become?⁷ Second, I will argue that writing, text-making of all kinds, is the foundation of communities. We commune with those whose writing touches us, or is capable of touching us. As such every graphematic structure is endlessly important as signifier and signified.

So fear and writing have significant consequences. Why truth? It is so . . . old fashioned. Truth, in my view, configures every action, each gesture, it is the sum of each stroke of the pen, each tap of the keyboard, indeed, each surreptitious glance in the mirror. Who will I be when I catch myself? Who will we be when we pause? Truth is not some quality attached either to words and their relations to objects, nor some property inherent in some state of affair, nor yet some coherence of theories making a web over our dusty universe. Instead, truth just is. If there is, and there is, then it is true. Every bit of it. An illusion is as true as a dream; my love is as true as my hate.

Connections between truth, fear, and writing are there (consciously and unconsciously). The connections are crucially important, for if we recognize them and use them, our writing will be better and we will be better. This is a book about writing to better ourselves. Another way to put this is that it is a book that offers one practical suggestion with respect to coming to understand ourselves. The practical suggestion is that when we write we should try to abandon ourselves to the point that we overcome our fear. We can do this by realizing that we need not save our writing, we need not share it, we need not re-read it. We may decide that we

want to do all of these things. Let this, the level of sorting, be our level of fear.

When we write ourselves, we are forced to think about all of our possibilities. We can cover over this or we can face it. In either case writing is a specific case of becoming _____, where _____ is what we need or desire for ourselves or our communities. Writing is one of the few practices that is necessarily emancipatory.⁸

As you might imagine these words, those you are reading now, are written after the fact of the other (real) writing—that which produced the books. When the major words, those which make up the actual studies, were written, it was not with the conscious aim in mind to analyze why we write. But this is what they have done. I started out to find the underlying ethics in the writers I either admire or feel I should admire; I ended up finding a method for writing ourselves, or even more precisely, the selves that we are *not*. However, when this is baldly explicit, the experience acquired is intensified but the ability to share the writing will diminish for many. Privacy issues come up here.⁹

In philosophy, privacy has been closely guarded. "I am not speaking for myself but of the general man. Later, I will not be speaking for myself but of the general woman. Later still, I will not be speaking for myself but of the general possibility of multiple selves." This hiding of the author belies a justified paranoia. If our philosophical thoughts are just claimed, we will be thought of as insane. Only a philosopher could write in all seriousness: 'I act with *complete* certainty. But this certainty is my own,' (Wittgenstein 1972, paragraph 174). Only a philosopher could make this "I" every "I" and hence lend credibility to the "utterance." The fear behind such an assertion is palpable. The content of this paragraph has been chosen; it has not been thrown out. It bore saying and writing. What if that paragraph were not attached to Wittgenstein *qua* philosopher? What if a lesser philosopher mouths those words? A salesperson? A lunatic? A drag queen? A führer?

Foucault has already played with these themes in his

writing, but then he does something strange: he allows himself to be interviewed on condition that he not be named. He becomes the masked philosopher *saying* not *writing* things like: "I would say at this point that philosophy is a way of reflecting on our relation to the truth. But it must not end there. It's a way of asking oneself: if such is the relation that we have with truth, then how should we conduct ourselves?" (Foucault 198,, 201). Philosophy's task could not have been done without the mask. It would sound, and be, ridiculous, naive. Because philosophers mean these things, they expose their fear. Fear motivates claims of subjective truth and, in turn, the claims cover up fear. Uncovering the being of fear involves using fear up. If absence of fear can lead to empowerment, then writing is necessary to that process.

Assume that making texts, writing words, turns out always to be political. Now notice Aristotle saying:

with regard to the things that are done from fear of greater evils or for some noble object (e.g. if a tyrant were to order one to do something base, having one's parents and children in his power, and if one did the action they were to be saved, but otherwise would be put to death), it may be debated whether such actions are involuntary or voluntary (Aristotle 1941, III,I,1110).

Is it the fear that calls into question the moral responsibility for the base deed in this case? Or is it fear that forces us to make meaning both in the linguistic and moral spheres of our lives? Aristotle viewed fear as neither virtue nor vice. Instead context and object determined when fear is good, when bad. Fear of the wrong things is the root of cowardice; fear of the right things an indication of wisdom, even of bravery.

The text from Aristotle helps us see that it is possible to do the right thing even though motivated by fear. But fear, as a subjective state of mind, is therefore not sufficient for producing the right thing. Fear is neutral in general; with specificity, it becomes a category for analysis (not of analysis). This state of mind that Aristotle describes, is one

where the state of mind itself cannot let us determine whether something is "right." Context and object are necessary for this determination. The subjective state is what can never be denied; its expression, however, cannot be certain of itself: hence the need to write and re-write. Nietzsche says:

We no longer esteem ourselves sufficiently when we communicate ourselves. Our true experiences are not at all garrulous. They could not communicate themselves even if they tried. That is because they lack the right word. Whatever we have words for, that we have already got beyond. In all talk there is a grain of contempt. Language, it seems, was invented only for what is average, medium, communicable. With language the speaker immediately vulgarizes himself. Out of a morality for deaf-mutes and other philosophers (Nietzsche 1954, pp. 530–31).

Nietzsche, like Heidegger, senses a tension between language and an experience which lies beneath it. But part of what they are each looking for is Heidegger himself, Nietzsche himself. Derrida presents Nietzsche as one who has a duty to say *who he is*, and also as one who knows that the answer (to "who am I?") is not an identity. Nietzsche says that "he has seen the dawning of a 'hidden history' of philosophers—*he does not say of philosophy*—and the 'psychology of their great names'" (Derrida 1988, p. 24).

Hegel doesn't sign—the system goes on without him. Nietzsche wants to sign. "It appears that Nietzsche signs and signs more than once. He is someone who writes his autobiography, recalls his name, his genealogy, and so forth" (Derrida 1988, p. 56). But in fact Hegel signs by not signing and does so with less trouble than does Nietzsche. When we write, we write also for the dead. Lately, some of the emphasis on the writing of dead people has been, "were they fascists?" This question puzzles me. If it is so important (and it is) why is it reserved for the dead. More importantly, why is it reserved for others? We need to ask ourselves at least as often as we ask of others: "What of my writing, what of my

reading denies fascism?" and "What of my text making and re-making assents to fascism?" I talk about signing my name to writing and thereby remind myself and my readers that I insert myself, in part, into this analysis as an object of analysis. And in fearing, fear can then look at the fearsome explicitly, and 'make it clear' to itself" (Heidegger 1962, p. 180). Part of what fear makes clear to itself is that the subjective status of one "I" is not universal.¹⁰ "That which fear fears about is that very entity which is afraid—Dasein. Only an entity for which in its Being this very being is an issue, can be afraid. Fearing discloses this entity as endangered and abandoned to itself" (Heidegger 1962, p. 181). My question, then, is not what *is* this person, this author? I believe that question to be irrelevant. My questions always concern "What I am becoming through the textual process?" "What are the communities made possible through such processes?" and "Which of these communities aid and abet revolution?" I would change "biography" to "zoography" or better still to "zoographical implication analysis."

2. *When Writing is Not*

If there were something like absolute silence, it would be very fear-inducing. Silence, means the absence of sound, of context. We rush in to fill emptiness with sound in what seems a natural way. We speak, but this is too ethereal. We write but this is too private. So, we write-for-a-public but the more conscious we are of why we write the less we want to claim the writing as our own. So what is it that we fear when we read and write? The answer has to be determined, in part, through the strange language and paradigms we have traditionally used for truth. We might conclude that we must free ourselves for truth in Heidegger's narrowest sense. We need to see texts as the evolutionary things that they are: they are determined, in part, by other texts, by those who read them. Freeing ourselves to this reality need

not affect what is scientific about what we do. It will serve to remind us of the objective in the subjective and the subjective in the objective. "Men have judged that a king can make rain; *we* say this contradicts all experience. Today they judge that aeroplanes and the radio, etc., are means for the closer contact of peoples and the spread of culture" (Wittgenstein 1972, paragraph 132). There are reasons not to so conclude. If we free ourselves for truth, then something of the responsibility or choice with respect to our commitments seems to vanish. Heidegger seems to deny the *sense* of such talk. Wittgenstein relegates us to games and rules with responsibility reserved for mystics.

For strategic purposes, Derrida finds it necessary to recast the concept of text as encompassing everything. This sidesteps the need to free ourselves, to open ourselves for meaning. But how are his readers to act in face of all-enveloping texts?¹¹ And in fact, few writers have introduced more novelty of form than Derrida himself. We have the suggestive pin-ups,¹² the off-size texts, the marginal wanderings, the strike-outs and so on. But what about giving up the structure? How about letting beings be? When we write about situations requiring action, or talk about them, the discourse should match the temporal exigencies involved. Can there be a fruitful dialectic between letting things be and trying to master contexts?

This is a book, in the end, about politics. Political writing has been too careful. One must be wary of letting beings be in one specific way. Namely, one ought not interpret the letting be as an absolution of one's responsibility in the world one constitutes and that one is constituted by. Still, it is frightening to write because it may turn out that we are the "they." That we are no better than Heidegger who writes to us about the "they" but who is one of "them" is the frightening possibility that we must not repress. We are afraid of writing because it is (potentially) public analysis. Philosophical and psychoanalytical analysis may differ only with respect to venue. We must overcome this fear by recognizing it and not succumbing to it in order to hide it.

I am trying to articulate the fear that motivates and paralyzes. This double edged movement that lets us pretend that we are notions and that denies that we are. The fear that is more comfortably directed at those who are no longer among us, as if problems of oppression, problems of fascism are a distant fear, a nightmare, not a reality. What is written must first be thought. What is thought is uncovered in/by/through our previous and future thinking. We cover our thinking, in part, because of fear. Fear blocks writing. Fear blocks truth. Fear blocks truth and writing by covering truth and writing. The initial covering of things relates to our fear of them. The uncovering in writing and speech is an overcoming of fear. This is the direction in which we are going although we have not yet specified what kind of relation exists between fear and writing, fear and the entities covered. The exact relationship is not one I can generalize. If "I" could generalize, "I" would be a situationist. If "I" could generalize, "I" could find an argument for anarcho-syndicalism, for example.

3. Thought Speaking then Writing Itself

Sometimes universal statements help us understand particular things in the world. The lesson from Kojève's Hegel is that most pertinent to speech and writing is that the freedom to be "I" entails the beginning of time as the end of history. This should paralyze us. Kojève's Hegel is a terrifying vision. If it were once capable of being instantiated it would already be instantiated and we would all be silent. Because we speak and because sometimes we even speak as other than ourselves (in the sense of $I = I$, the I equal to itself), that vision is not possibly "true." What is important to this discussion is that there is never a speaking "I" equal to "it's" "self." Processes which hide thought thereby minimizing writing. Television hides thought. Education hides thought. Sexism hides thought. Classism hides thought. Ra-

cism hides thought. But importantly, each of these ism's mimic thought in exacting detail. As automata, we parrot again and again the script that we are denying.

4. *Writing Ourselves*

That Are Not. I can write about three distinct experiences one might have while writing. I could write about more than three. I could spend the rest of my life writing about the distinct experiences one might have while writing. Some writing experiences could never be written but I could gesture toward those. I could make this my life's work. One distinct form of writing that can be mentioned, involves writing through a fictional character. This experience is somewhat surprising. One "creates" a character and "creates" various situations in which a character might act. As one writes the story, the narrative, the life or thoughts of that character, a moment occurs when the character "takes over" and writes itself. Well, of course not *really*. But the phenomenological description could hardly be otherwise. After an hour of writing "through" a character in this way, one may pause to re-read only to feel startled on re-reading the passage, for example, to find that the character has done something that you, its creator, were not aware of. Or, one might wish in retrospect that the character "had decided" to do something else. Why is the writer not able to articulate the magic adhering to this process?¹³ Why is this feeling of being taken over a part of writing fiction? How come it seems so unbelievable when it is attached to a real book, a real author. Thus Simenon talks this way about his writing and when we hear these words it is hard to believe him; hard to credit that his characters have "lives of their own." Such talk seems precious or false. OK, precious and false.

A second class of writing experience involves creating a character through whom to write theory. There might be two extremes to this experience. At the mundane end, although

even here the adrenalin can be a little overwhelming, one recognizes that one is on deadline. Oh no, one thinks. "I" can't write this piece. Instead, one imagines who might be able to write this piece. And then one writes through that creation. Some people find this so much a part of the process that they name such characters. Kierkegaard is the obvious person to consider here. At the other end of this extreme one may find a fear so powerful that the writing ceases. One is like Madame Yeats. Writing but not writing. One becomes a vessel for something else entirely. This too, is unbelievable. We can hear these stories. We can understand them. We can make up additional stories about hysteria, about unconscious desires, about sexual repression.

Finally there is the writing experience that one might call absolutely clear. This is when you know exactly what is being written at every moment for the duration. In writing, there are times when there is an abstraction from the particulars of existence. We have experienced this: while writing a letter perhaps, or choosing adornment. I believe that if we have experienced something, even if we cannot explain it, it is necessary that the experience were possible. That is, there is some sense in which I must disagree with Wittgenstein when he says that: "When the answer cannot be put into words, neither can the question be put into words. The *riddle* does not exist. If a question can be framed at all, it is also *possible* to answer it" (Wittgenstein 1961, 6.5). So this magic moment which has no explanation is possible.

There is another issue that concerns me. When experiencing these kinds of writing, a very strange thing can occur. (Other sorts of experiences, some of them counter-intuitive in the extreme also produce this odd result.) The strange/odd thing in question is that when one is writing, one can, on occasion, realize that one has forgotten ones sex/gender. It is true! Who can deny this? There are moments of writing where one has forgotten and it is a strange sort of drag: one is who one is not. So this book is about ethics; it is about politics, but, it is mostly about gender politics. By the end of the book, I think it will be clear that ethics *is* politics which

in turn *imply* gender politics. Letting beings be may very well turn out to include: letting ourselves go. This couldn't help but be political. Creating a mastery of context may turn out to include: always being in drag. This can't help but circumscribe a politics of gender: gender anarchy.