

PEDAGOGY OF A CENTER: MADNESS, DYSLEXIA AND BANNED MEMORY PERFORM WRITING AT THE EDGE

“Imagine a naked man prone on the floor. He could be dead, looking for something, waiting to be fondled, penetrated even. He wears socks and shoes. Then, imagine an excerpt of a symphony, or an etude - tattooed on his buttocks. Musicians, with instruments at hand can read the language, play the excerpt. For that, he cannot be penetrated or fondled, only looked at. Then, imagine half a body. The rest is cut, gone, missing. **You are left with half a body, a musical tattoo, socks and shoes, visible hair on the legs.** Where are you? Did you wander into a morgue, a surgical amphitheater, an exhibition of freak bodies? Imagine your self interacting with this naked body of gender and writing. Only the gender is assumed and the writing also. Is imagination a site of the mind or a physical entity? Are you standing, walking, watching, stepping over, seeing? Are you the naked man or woman on the floor? A perfectly completed half body of beeswax, cotton, wood, leather and human hair? [Robert Gober/Untitled, 1990. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam]”

Suggestions, softly uttered, or explicitly articulated within an assignment of writing can be followed, disregarded, or picked - like flowers. It depends on the giver and the taker. Within the constructs of a writing seminar they can lead to a text by a student, a writer, or a writer-to-be. A vocabulary of codes already taught, explored and accepted has prepared the participants to incorporate the “half naked body of a man prone on the floor” into a text or create a text about it, from it. If no codes have been established the shared language between disciplines, understanding and the production of thought will initiate the process of writing from a different position. Text produced will probably stand in for time needed to

comprehend connections and intercepted modes of thinking. Imagination can be accessed or not, depending on personal and collective involvement with the **unspeakable. A prerequisite for writing.**

An inquisitive mind will seek to find the missing body within its own constructs of intellect, curiosity, knowledge, memory, and experience. A mind, in habit-to-follow the instructive methodology of teacher/scholar will seek the missing body within learned constructs of knowledge, canons of literature, acceptable textual incantations, anxiety of publication. Imagination may or may not be of use. It will be up to the writer of the expected text to complete the missing body with his/her text **or** reproduce it **or** bypass it altogether. It will be up to the writer to construct a dialogue with the international language of music intercepted by his/her own language, or not.

We, in this room are not prone on the floor, are **not** naked, do **not** have musical scores tattooed on our backs or bottoms. We may have markings on the body, we may not. We, in this room, are teachers, pedagogues, administrators, scholars and writers. Our bodies are present. If we do possess missing bodies, they may be present but they are not visible. Our languages vary, our mother-tongues also. We teach to be heard, to make a living, to find new method, to enable our own processes of inspiration and intellect. We have been taught to teach, or we improvise, or we create pedagogies of our own.

Imagine three writers inhabiting a space of contention. Not because it causes strife but because it is surrounded by it. Greece, founded on discourse and imagination, has forgotten or misplaced the imaginary fables of Socrates or Plato, and has focused instead on obsessive repetitions of Oedipus, Antigone and Creon. Ambivalent and furious with its world-accepted

intellectual and artistic history it **jerks time** and **people** around, hopeful for a glorious future built on insurrection and irreverence. The three writers are by profession: a high-ranking employee of public health, an interior designer, and an amusement park entrepreneur. They speak an audible Greek **and** inaudible fragments of their own speech acts: they promise a language to themselves, they are ordered to forget it, they greet their desire to write, they are invited to forget that desire, they congratulate their origins and they despise their origins. I have chosen to speak about their work because they have been relentless in their pursuit of text, singularly their own. In doing so, all three overcame passionate obstacles between family, school, and Greece.

Elena Alyssandratou, ***Le train sucrée***

Stephanos Papadimitriou, ***The dyslexic mouth of bilingual monsters***

Alexandros Aidonopoulos, ***Lacquered Tongues***

It is important to mention the three writers participated in the same writing seminar. A very intense and rigorous class that lasted three years and aimed to create professional writers. We had to find, inhabit and move from position to position **in between** desire, fear, audacity, responsibility, ambivalence and freedom. The seminar consisted of four women and four men. After its first year, they all enrolled and attended without fail, a theory based seminar on the philosophy of writing. **Philosophy of language, performance, art, psychoanalysis, queer theory** and **postcolonial studies** were called upon to devise a curriculum that enabled the writers-to-be to perform not only the practice of writing but also to accept the possession of functional and dysfunctional tools forged out of themselves **and** their unique understanding of **discourse and discipline**.

Elena Alyssandratou, not her real name, is a scientist who seeks to write a novel about the world. She speaks Greek, French, English and Spanish. She writes in Greek to explain the relationship between science and literature. She often breaks out into angry sobs. Instead of finding her words she locks them even further. During a private session I sit across from her and talk about madness. I assign Louise Bourgeois' work to her and we agree on fragmentation. If writing is not used as a therapy but as a traversing act between REASON AND UNREASON we can construct madness as a metamorphic pattern of knowledge. Elena responds and produces the voice of Kristin, a maddened daughter. She reinvents the experience of madness as **Kristin** attempts to outrun a destructive locomotive that obsesses inside her mouth and around her teeth.

Excerpt from Chapter 10 of her book, *Le train sucree*

" The day before yesterday the train began to run on my dentures while my teeth were completely covered by liquified food. The train sunk in the food and came to a halt.

He was cross-stitching his liver, studiously and with care. In the beginning he designed a beautiful still life on the liver. A meadow full of flowers and animals with a smiling woman in the middle. When grandfather completed his cross-stitched rendition, Kristin realized the woman in the meadow was her grandmother. Grandfather continued to perform his needle work on his stomach. The representation on his stomach depicted the same woman, her grandmother smiling next to the sea. Grandfather continued with his lungs. The lungs were the ideal canvas to portray her grandmother on the clouds, always with a smile.

"Grandfather why do you cross-stitch your organs?

"Well, child, your grandmother loved needlework and I decided to give her a tablecloth. She did not have time to take it with her before she departed and she does not like to eat on a bare table..."

The locomotive, though in a consistent out of control motion, is a stable point of reference, a paradox. It causes destruction and it transfers destruction - an odd condition for negotiation - inside a mouth. The mouth is not there to speak or eat. Food is punishment, murderous

weapon, memory without excrement. The violence, caused and produced by the train, the violence **inside the mouth** pushes the **narrative yet completely fragmented subject, Kristin**, out of the human realm. The existential question the novel poses: can human beings be changed into something else? If Prometheus is the narcissism of civilization, then **the train/ Kristin construction** is a paradigm that breaks down narcissistic mechanisms because the promise of the returning eagle is **not** the devouring of a self-revived liver, not a production-consumption cause and effect, but a symptomatic logic assembled in each chapter. A logic derived from madness and in the same time calling out madness. The process of creativity is not to tell but un/tell, not to transform but de/form, not to organize thought but dis/organize thought. The liver, is not a biological organ but a surface to be stitched - by a cross-gendered grand/FATHER. The praxis of needlework, historically performed by women, is taken over not to usurp gender roles but to deconstruct memory by self-afflicting pain. **Only pain does not exist.** The vital organs of the body, liver, lungs, stomach, are **not** there to sustain life but to be distorted. In the absence of pain the story of the family is understood. Piercing, **not telling**, produces a barbarous space from which the reader can see/perceive the family members pushed outside their humanity. In the absence of suffering [**if there is no pain there is no suffering**] living is not appreciated or valued, - the praxis of stitching crosses living matter into death- and memory [a vital component of the human construction] is incidental as it is taken over by a constantly disruptive mythmaking. If madness is the deterioration between the process of thought and the responsiveness of emotion then madness gets the subject out of the condition the subject is born into. The means are unspeakable, the story

also. Neither the promise of death, nor that of survival are of importance, of consequence. The story, a metaphoric mode to understand life, is distortion because the writer believes only distortion cannot be eliminated. The very practice of writing is unsure of its existence; it raises asylums inside the mouth and then it demolishes the asylums and the mouth, it gives space to madness and then it becomes madness, it provides understanding and then makes the very same understanding irrelevant, it uses life and then it dis/uses life. If elimination, censorship, annihilation is not a barrier then the understanding of human existence is annulled.

Stephanos Papadimitriou, his real name, is a soft spoken man, who seeks to write a novel about himself and dyslexia. He possesses a brilliant mind consistently belittled since early childhood. The lack of information on dyslexia increases the cruelty of his teachers and the shame of his parents. He is rendered inadequate; the family learns to accept the ordeal, the school does not. At the seminar, Stephanos is open and extremely mistrustful. It is clear from the beginning, to survive, he had created a complex system between imagination, intellect and anguish, which he kept to himself. Accepting dyslexia was to accept his experience. Appreciating his knowledge of design, I ask him to sketch a map that would accurately show his thought process. His intricate disruptive associations between word and meaning reveal an amazing potential for literature. Instead of making him comply to language and form, I encourage him to transform his map of disassociation into writing.

Text 20 from his book, *The dyslexic mouth of bilingual monsters*

"Sometimes an uninvited visitor comes. They welcome him with gold in their eyes and let him levitate above the bottles. The mice, mommy dislikes so much, find the opportunity to run through the thorns of the carpet and enter the house. He, a member of a musical orchestra, was declared, some time ago, their leader. Everyone remember the time he played flute inside the family home and walked the yard with a rectangular suitcase. He brought the mice inside the house. How did his clothes fit in such a small suitcase when he left, they will wonder and laugh. Then they ask him about his travels. The mice buried as they were under the garden, under the shovel of the bedroom **do not see**. They burrow under the piano. The visitor describes a journey and his description beats on the strings of **e flat** and sounds enchanting. (The same note heard often by mommy's finger.) The mice, dazed by the strikes of the stories begin to bite the piano. Wood chips and teeth fill the house. Mommy, who suddenly can see her steps, is the one who understands. They all feel bad about the visitor as he seems obviously bothered by the hairy parasites. The notes and the mice, black spots both, do not know about music, they simply work for it, they do not know what they carry on their hair. They will conclude by saying mice are not lovers of music. The mice will deny that insisting that they love music."

After the first reading of his text, his receives the following feedback:

1. How is the language of music different from the language of text?
2. How is the language of writing different from the language of speech?
3. Could the music that derives from, for example Iannis Xenakis compositions, answer to the need of understanding dyslexia as an innovative system of meaning?
4. How is the stochastic process involved in your writing?
5. Is dyslexia a system or is it a disruption of systems?
6. You, as a dyslexic producer of meaning, **how** do you intervene the conceptualization of meaning so that you can offer new ways of perception?
7. Are you a new composer or a new musician?
8. Are you a creator of language or a disruptor of language?
9. Are you yourself, or you the son of a Father in the systems of language and thought

10. Is the mother the mouse and as such does she consume achievement or the story of the achievement?

Alexandros Aidonopoulos, is an intense man caught in the ambivalence of possession. How does a man who owns the family business and is rich because of it, escape it? Can he hide his own fragments of literature inside textual incantations and in the process discover himself, his language, his writing? Several times he completes a manuscript. The story of an amusement park and its ownership. Each time the manuscript is given back to him as unreadable. He accepts the rejection and returns to the same writing. A “wheel of fortune” not overlooking the geography of amusement but surveilling the efforts of its owner. Before the manuscript turns into the obsession of a merry-go-round, I give him **writing assignments** linked to memory as riddle. The Sphinx posing the riddle and solves the riddle. To find himself he must write about himself. And to write about himself he must remember himself. To remember himself he must disembark the cyclical structures created by the family to imprison themselves and him in the solitary profit of amusement.

Alexandros Aidonopoulos, *Lacquered Tongues*, excerpt from Chapter 15

- “ 1. Nature inside dealt slabs of concrete. My body dealt slabs of concrete. I felt the tongue of dust at the edge of my nose. It was a tongue my mother never spoke to me about it. In the beginning before I knew that was a tongue indeed, I spoke silently. I spoke without teeth. I spoke slowly so that I could hear it.
2. It was nice inside the tunnel. I felt an autumn day falling on me with force. Lights with moist bees on them trickled moisture inside my clothes. These clothes my Father did not buy. A motion I could not understand forced me to bend so the pain could fall of me, rapidly.
3. I turned my head back. I turned my whole body back. I saw a big road entering our trailer. Entering the landscape I was raised in. 3+3 corridors of traffic. 1+1 supplementary corridors (emergency exits my mother called

them). 5+5 the sum of roads that crossed through my trailer home. That crossed through the amusement park I grew up in. We became a set of clothes that did not fit the body that came and dressed itself upon us.

4. ... Now I must be the first to get out of the tunnel. I must get out from where my mother put the laundry to dry at night. From where my father repaired the shut down motors. The tunnel unperturbed. Nothing has crossed it. I could not see the spoiling of movement in there. I am beginning to be afraid of my eyes...."

In the discovery of self, a **freak edifice** is writing the book; mostly an amusement park, less human. How much of a being is he? Is he a textual being undertaken by a real being or is a real being slipping away into a textual being? Do the invented human beings **of the story** attract the actual human beings **of the reading** because they allow them to ultimately become the actors of their actual beings in a theatre called life? What is the material the being is created from? That is still to be articulated by the textual being - **A MUTATED BEING** at the limits OF THE UNSPEAKABLE reigned by the amusement park family and not by the writer or the text. The amusement park is a condition and as a condition it is alive - it multiplies like cells, a disease. It reacts to the writing and turns itself into legacy, profession, language, family, machine-made memory, transgression and order. Code comes to help. Let me find my kind, says the writer to the textual being. Multiple subjects of the **I** are articulated. The writer, in frenetic pace, can only put on paper as many subjects as he can catch in whatever position or condition he can catch them. "Who can say I am hungry?" asks the writer and is fed with an ad hoc compilation of existence. No one can say **if** mutation, development or distortion is at play. Perhaps it is more accurate to consider a crisscrossing between them as habit surrenders to delirium and delirium to habit. The literary gift of the writer rests upon his courage to be entirely dismantled by the text. He desperately seeks to inhabit a shared inventiveness between himself and the lack of himself, between the

benevolence of the word and the wickedness of meaning, between the ethos of writing and the prolific expansion with which amusement usurps humanity.

Teeth, mouth, and writing at the edge. You write to exist. Not only as a writer but as a human being or an invention of sorts. Are writers freaks? Do we need to assume philosophical renditions of the self? Can we exist outside philosophy? Does knowledge makes us human? If humanness is not the ethos of knowledge what is knowledge? Is it the way the teeth work? Is it the way writing performs combat with the mind? Is it the body sufficient in its experience of disbandment? Can we be half writing half human? Can we be meat, bone, banned memory, an amusement ride, a stitched liver or a lung, a train running wild inside a cavity? In the UNBALANCED world we live in, a world we create and sustain, how can we continue to burden writing with the impossible task of completion?

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