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Heuristics of the Teaching of Poetry Writing

Abstract:

This paper considers the prospects for the learning and teaching of poetry writing in academic contexts and in general.

"We shall be better and braver and less helpless if we think that we ought to enquire, than we should have been if we indulged in the idle fancy that there was no knowing and no use in seeking to know what we do not know." (Socrates, Meno 183)

"But oh! my dear Ernest, to sit next to a man who has spent his life in trying to educate others! What a dreadful experience that is! How appalling is that ignorance which is the inevitable result of the fatal habit of imparting opinions! How limited in range the creature's mind proves to be! How it wearies us, and must weary himself with, with its endless repetitions and sickly reiteration! How lacking it is in any element of intellectual growth! In what a vicious circle it always moves!" (Oscar Wilde, The Critic as Artist 885)

"Learning is, after all, an infinite task." (Deleuze, Difference and Repetition 166)

In Merleau-Ponty's formulation of we as (becoming) the question, and of the world as reply, we discover a community, inevitably of speech, the function of which cannot help but be heuristic, because it is only in such an open and dialectical movement that speech is possible. Kwant frames this as follows: "the subject who is openness to the world enters the world as a question, so that the appearing world always has the character of a reply" (Merleau-Ponty 68).

Yet it needs seriously to be doubted that poetry, as practice between or beyond its own or other limits, can in any way be learnable. Nor need we assume the desirability of such a hypothetical learning. There may be a writing cure, and yet this means neither that writing is all cure nor that writing cures all (Sneja Gunew in "Authenticity and the Writing Cure" in Sheridan 111-23). Once our words are loosed to paper, not even death can cure us of writing. It becomes our accomplished fact and must find itself a death aside of ours. That is why Mayakovsky can write in his suicide note that he is in no hurry and that there is no point waking or troubling his addressee (Rothenberg and Joris 249-50).

Poetry, in defining itself, via Romanticism and Modernism, as a practice of transgression, as the practice of a subject continuously frustrated in the effort of passing beyond itself, raises doubts (unless it is possible to learn what is beyond learning) that there is anything learnable in aesthetic practices. In any institutional setting all of the philosophical difficulties of heuristics and pedagogy now face the prospects for writing. A question hangs over the objectivity of a standard which fails to defer to the contingency of judgement. A question hangs over the validity of a judgement which only refers to canonic criteria as they are already established. As well, the academy and the writing industry are both threatened by the prospect of "qualified", credentialed writers and the establishment of new cliques, in a field where there seem to be more than enough already. A conflict has been well attested between the needs and assumptions of creative writing and the context in which it could be taught. Archibald MacLeish writes:

The whole situation of the writing course is a reversal of the usual academic pattern. Not only is there no subject, there is no content either. Or, more precisely, the content is the work produced by the students. And the relation of the teacher to his [her] students is thus the opposite of the relationship one would expect to find. Ordinarily it is the teacher who knows, the student who learns. here it is the student who knows, or should, and the teacher who learns or tries to. (Monteith and Miles 69)

We might hope from these observations to establish from a pedagogy of writing (and the disturbances it offers to the usual pattern) a circle wherein we acknowledge that it is by teaching we learn and by learning we teach; or rather that in such a confusion these two become a single process and one for which we lack a name. It would be naïve however to think that any new discipline could be allowed an unfettered potential to reform its entire academic setting.

If we assume a function for writing in the academy, as indeed the academy drives all its disciplines to stand in a functional relationship with the totality they comprise, then we are forced to acknowledge overlaps and

contradictions among the functions which creative writing or the writing of poetry might assume: these are respectively a therapeutic, a canonic (or canon making/breaking) and a facilitative function. In their orientation, respectively towards the idea of making selves or of making literature, these functions reflect an inversion of the function generally assumed in the read-only teaching of literature. A facilitative function assumes that creative writing, though furnishing a strictly unnecessary product, is a training for other (necessary) forms of writing, appropriate because it provides a motivation which other genres, though more authentic to "real-world" tasks, lack in the classroom. Whereas a therapeutic approach to the teaching of writing has assumed that it is the act of writing which performs a function equivalent to the building of character, the idea of making writers (hopefully "great" ones) depends on the assumption that an institutional place is possible for the process by which the characters write the plot. The former idea, I would argue, is by itself, far less subversive than the latter. It may be a decadent (and ironically) self-marginalising solipsism. The latter idea assumes an unsupportable arrogance on the part of anyone participating in it.

Here we meet perhaps the principle contention in terms of which it has been argued that the teaching of art is impossible: getting into the canon is so rare an event that teaching with this avowed end must be a more or less doomed activity. In this sense it is thought that the craft but not the art of writing may be taught. If, it is argued, only the craft can be taught, then that which is taught can bear no deliberate connection to the canon, on which its products are modelled and to which they aspire. Thus are invoked all manner of distinctions between the high and the low of cultural production.

The distinction between art and craft, which bears thus on the teachability and learnability of poetry writing, is one of judgement and emphasis. In it we may discover that part of the romantic conception of inspiration which needs to be discarded. In the case of those practices which know themselves as craft, we can say that the repetition of a technique entails a knowledgeable practice in which one does what one does because one does from knowing. In the case of the artwork however, we recognise an experimental method in which one discovers what to do by doing what one has not yet done: one's practice is the result of practice (and is as such unteachable and unlearnable). The attractive thing about art in this conception is that it establishes a practice for and about the rest of life. Art, as practice, frames a future, and not only for itself, from the act of not forgetting the past (its own and everybody's).

Thus it is the craftsman who can name what s/he is making: it has enough anonymity to absorb the individuation which goes into its making, thus to retain the semblance of a use-value, even if it has none. The purely ornamental in this circumstance, take on ornamentality as a surrogate utility. The artwork, on the other hand, shows enough of the individuation which went into its making to bury the anonymous (including the canonic, i.e. collective) effort which made the past of this present moment of aesthetic production possible. The fact that we are able to name a class of such works 'paintings', specify that they fill up wall space, have a resale value and may form part of an investment portfolio, in no way undermines their status as out of the reach of any measure of utility.

Nevertheless, from the point of view of heuristics, what an institutional setting for the apprenticeship of any sort of art achieves, is to break down the distinction between art and craft. The distinction collapses because it becomes clear that what we call art and what we call craft (the high and the low of aesthetic production) depend on the interaction of a method, on the one hand for knowing, and on the other for not knowing, what to do. We need to acknowledge that there is a craft in poetry writing, because however we value its expression of ambivalence, sense must always arise from a past which is common to subjects capable of understandings of the poem. We need to acknowledge that there is an art in building because it is a practice which, in human hands, demonstrates that difference arises from repetition. That art and its processes are of the world and fail to stand out of its negotiations, just as the fact that the world never succeeds in standing aside of art, is what Walter Benjamin showed in establishing the symmetry between fascism's aestheticisation of politics and communism's politicisation of art (Frascina and Harris 306).

When we ask then whether or not work is inspired and how students of an art should go about procuring inspiration, we ignore the circular logic by which the canon and inspiration name each other as necessary conditions; we ignore the fact that there is a body of past knowledge and practice to which the becoming artist has access. However difficult the avowed production of literature and the idea of writing as a path to individuation (and perhaps responsibility) are to untangle, they nevertheless provide hidden agendas each for the other and coincide in the idea of poetry as a world therapy. The assumption in this paper will be that when we speak of poetry writing, in an institutional or heuristic setting, we speak of some marriage of these conceptions.

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Kant concludes *The Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* by telling us that fine art has a manner and not a method of teaching, that it cannot be prescribed:

The master must illustrate what the pupil is to achieve and how achievement is to be attained, and the proper function of the universal rules to which he ultimately reduces his treatment is rather that of supplying a convenient text for recalling its chief moments to the pupil's mind, than of prescribing them to him. (Kant 548)

Kant goes on to argue that the artist's training is most appropriately prepared for by an education in the humanities, because such a propaedeutic is most likely to provide the artist with the requisite social spirit which is constituted in the conjunction of a universal feeling of sympathy and the ability to communicate one's inmost self. The true preparation for taste, Kant argues "is the development of moral ideas and the culture of moral feeling" (Kant 549).

Kant's view seems complacently straightforward and to ignore the disconcerting we associate with what the canon next includes. The prospects of poetry writing today are doubtful pedagogically because they require a curriculum for rule breaking, for risk taking, for undecideding and for refusing to know; and because it is doubtful (despite past experience) whether an academy can deliberately allow its anathema a place, let alone a site to grow (Moirá Monteith in Monteith and Miles 11-12). Of course it may not be able to help allowing such a place, but this is a very different question from the one we ask in suggesting the academy provide poetry writing with a niche. If the academy does allow its time and resources to be appropriated for writing, then we need to ask both who controls the hidden curriculum by which this is allowed and as well what it is the academy steals from poetry in this act of charity; what is stolen from its processes and from its open curricula. The adoption of a covert agenda for writing (or any other discipline) should not allow the sidestepping of those questions which situate the academy in its context of culture.

A secret place has been allowed poetry writing in the form of what de Certeau describes as the *perruque* (de Certeau 24-28) - in the form of a theft of time, of tools, a site for the bricolage of making art. Could we create (and here is the contradiction - as a deliberate fifth column, means of avoiding a permanent opposition outside) a space within the institution where writing can happen, as perhaps it only ever happens creatively, despite its context? Then what will be the status of the unofficial space allowed writing by the academy? One of the things the English Department produced was poets. It furnished them unofficially with a means of self-apprenticeship in the form of a privileged access to the canon; an access which while avowing other purposes (teacher training, character building) always venerated the objects of the canon (e.g. poems) more highly than the purposes its own teaching avowed. The achievement of canonic status being so rare an event as to assure the failure of virtually all students against any such measure of purpose (albeit subject to decisions impossibly removed from the process of teaching), it has taken a shift from focus on the canon to allow creative writing a place in the academy. And yet the English Department did provide the kind of propaedeutic of which Kant wrote. To say that academies have always hidden such curricula as allowed the making of poets and that these furnish their best results, is not to answer the question as to who decides such curricula. We may say that the strength of the hidden curriculum is in its not needing to acknowledge that it is in fact undecidable and yet an heuristic based on any such theft as the *perruque* will be in constant danger of being co-opted and rendered harmless, canonic, more of the same (just as the canon itself must be subject to the subversion of a *perruque*). The provision of a place for the *perruque* then would be a contradictory conception, doubly so in the case of poetry writing, because poetry depends as practice on a mistakenness and indirection which the academy (as transmitter of the canon) cannot (and yet ultimately must) allow. Just as art does not succeed in being what it sets out to be so the academy does not necessarily succeed in containing the consequences of an art by allowing it a place.

Spivak writes that: "It can be said for Derrida that, by positioning citationality as originary, he has radicalised bricolage as the questioning of all ideologies of adequation and legitimacy" (Spivak 171). *Perruque* is to bricolage as irony is to the field of tropes, a theft among all of the means of exchange. The ironist's motivation (in lieu of a duty) is a kind of *perruque*: the theft and redeployment of meaning from its everyday homes. And in literature the possibility of the *perruque* depends on the fact of a canon, depends on there being an entity from which to effect a theft. In allowing, via the activity of poetry, a place for what is acknowledged to be mistaken, the canon and its institutional setting would face directly the future of their own practice, in which they themselves will have been wrong (thus short circuiting the historical process in which they invest). We could argue that, whether or not forced into public avowal, they do already do this, that it is a posture necessitated by any degree of reflexive awareness on their part.

Nevertheless the negative consequences of the argument which assumes that writing is unlearnable deserve attention. What does it mean to say that the practice of poetry cannot be learned and/or cannot be taught?

Does it not offer all forms of privilege to the established canonic order and to the critical habitus as means of establishing it? It suggests that, from an academic point-of-view, the processes of this order are reified and unchallengeable, as likewise are hypostasised the critical habitus in which the canon lives as practice denying its reality as practice. Giving way to the directive, never spoken, that the academy and its community may only read the canon and never write it leaves us open to the essential contradiction of canonic logic; essentially the same contradiction which dwells in the abstraction *langue*: that the stillness of the canon as pretended completion depends on practices in action - which can be ignored but never denied. The canon would make such an impossible denial of its source in words as they unfold. Canonic logic contradicts itself because while (assuming if not) arguing that the inside and the outside are finally divided, in fact it is able to leave neither of these alone. Nor do these leave each other alone. So that we may say that not only is poetry the subject and object of canonic rejection but equally it is threatened by and is what threatens the canon. The ongoing production of poetry (the life of its process) is what subjects the canon to ceaseless renovation. Ruling out an heuristic of the practice of poetry confines the connection

between learning and literary art to exegesis. This would pre-suppose that there are models but no way to them as practice (only as énoncé).

To say otherwise would be to claim the answer: that one knows the means of making writers. The resistance we strike here is not so much the limit between creative and learnable writing as between canonisable and other writing. And this limit is legitimate because a bona fide threat to the separation of powers (between the makers and the keepers) would appear to be posed by the idea of submitting both of these personae to the one academic hierarchy. In fact this threat is only apparent because there actually is a world (of readers and writers, performers and audiences) outside of the academy. So the question becomes, not whether anything is threatened by the inclusion of the processes by which arise objects of study; the question is rather, as it originally was, whether such objects can be produced in such a context as the academy.

The writing of poems (and perhaps the making of poets) require modest personae because of the real difficulty of attaining canonisation, which notwithstanding our opinions as to the credentials and credibility of the canon's guardians, remains our means of access to the world's past creativity. To call oneself a poet or to claim that one knows what they need to know (and thus how to make them) is to serve oneself up for rejection. Now while this may be the general lot of those who wrestle with mistakenness in the hope of creating (and becoming) what is next allowed, the nature of such a mistakenness is, as perhaps in science, largely experimental, and consists not so much in the terms of Kant's motto, *aude sapere*, as in its opposite: the poet (and the one who helps becoming poets) are the ones who dare not to know (and not to judge). We need seriously to ask whether the academy, as it is or can become, is able to provide such an heuristic environment for the apprenticeship of poets.

The canon, and its micro-operation in a grammar, could be described as the arrangements of words to which breath returns. While all of our words are canonic (it is by this means that we have them), when we fall into speech, or equally writing, it is thus we make forwards a way in the world, thus we make the world as well ours and subject to both our wills and mistakenness.

If we say of poetry then that it is a phenomenon so idiosyncratic in the means of its creation that no lesson could ever reveal these, then we ignore both the universality of those conditions (outlined immediately above) which the poem (as content of the canon) meets and the fact of the manner of investigation which reading does indeed constitute. This observation of course begs the question as to what role there can be for teaching when the only way is for the student to find her/his own way. In these terms we may see aesthetics, since Kant, as a kind of dare for heteronomy to assert itself over the *a priori* claims on which universal judgement must base itself.

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If we go along with Oscar Wilde's assertion that nothing worth knowing can be taught (Wilde 862), if we accept that the roles of pedagogue and academy have the limited efficacy of facilitation, then our conception of learning needs also to be limited - to an apprenticeship in what goes on around poetry, to the understanding of the contextual conditions in which poetry is possible (or impossible) as practice. The assumption here will be that the writing (and reading) of literature are only ever able to be taught around. An heuristics should consist, then, above all else in allowing - in giving refuge (whether openly or clandestinely, supportively or in adversative manner) to those enquiries, practices and impulses from which creative work comes. Such an heuristics would amount to a licence to play, as well to the making of the space in which play becomes possible.

Inside or outside of the institutional frame, to speak of coming into aesthetic practice is to deal with a self-apprenticeship, which consists in allowing the self to assert through and in the larger forces making selves. In other words - and here we run up against a regression the limits of which are both of self and of community - aesthetic practice requires a freedom which entails constituting ourselves as among the forces of our making. For these reasons the project of an heuristics is chosen here over that of a pedagogy.

In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze elaborates a relationship which contrasts the operation of learning and apprenticeship. Deleuze insists that:

To learn is to enter into the universal of the relations which constitute the Idea, and into their corresponding singularities... "learning" always takes place in and through the unconscious, thereby establishing the bond of a profound complicity between nature and mind. The apprentice, on the other hand, raises each faculty to the level of its transcendent exercise. (Deleuze 165)

Whereas learning is, for Deleuze, an infinite task, "apprenticeship falls rather on the side of the rat in the maze" (Deleuze 166). The apprentice, for Deleuze, is the one who "attempts to give birth to that second power which grasps that which can only be sensed" (Deleuze 165). Such a birth involves neither knowledge nor learning per se but is what Deleuze refers to as the education of the senses. It is such that:

We never know in advance how someone will learn: by means of what loves someone becomes good at Latin, what encounters make them a philosopher, or in what dictionaries they learn to think. The limits of the faculties are encased one in the other in the broken shape of that which bears and transmits difference. There is no more a method for learning than there is for finding treasures, but a violent training, a culture or *paideia* which affects the entire individual... Method is the means of that knowledge which regulates the collaboration of all of the faculties. (Deleuze 165)

A curriculum - as means of making explicit what is to be learned - may be doomed not to effect the transcendence it purports to comprehend. If this kind of understanding is unimportant to the apprentice then by what means is the education of the senses effected? Imitation and delight, we will remember, are for Aristotle the two original instinctual causes of poetry. This he explains through the fact that:

to be learning something is the greatest of pleasures not only to the philosopher but also to the rest of mankind, however small their capacity for it; the reason of the delight in seeing the picture is that one is at the same time learning - gathering the meaning of things. (Aristotle Vol II, 682)

Heuresis (Latin *inventio*) is the first step in the composition of a literary work, the first part of rhetoric: the discovery or the devising of content. Learning, if we are permitted to bring forward such an etymologically founded misreading, is then the beginning of practice. With some misgivings the classical world is willing to concede poetry a place as a vehicle for learning. Despite various emphases on a role for inspiration there seems, for the ancients of Western civilisation, to have been little doubt that the making of poetry was a skilled, and therefore (for them) learnable and teachable activity. The modern world, especially in those centuries immediately before ours, has been more doubtful. Conveying all poetic power to some alliance between the imagination and inspiration, with intuition to guide the way, tends to not only make the composition of poetry something unlearnable, it makes the instances of production unpredictable and leaves the writer with the pessimistic likelihood that every next poem will be her/his last. Hence the myriad of assertions akin to that of Henri Michaux, that the mere ambition to write a poem kills it (in Rothenberg and Joris 618).

These notions, if not contradicted by what we know of the education and pre-occupation of poets through the centuries, at least leave these out of the story. Writers, as writing, come from somewhere (as Bourdieu has illustrated with his concepts of position and disposition). The mind of the writer is one elaborately prepared for what it will perhaps be unable to decide, that is, for its aesthetic productions. The intense apathy which T.S. Eliot recommended as the pre-condition for inspired writing (Eliot 17), is a state available to a very few, themselves the product of a highly specialised and socialised training.

As in science, there is no question that moments of insight come at times from the cultivated indirection of a relaxed mind, one which is not trying to solve the problem at hand. In short, from "letting go". In the bath, asleep. Celebrated examples are those of Archimedes and displacement, Kekule von Stradonitz' benzene chain, and James Watt's peaceful Sunday walk which made possible the steam engine. No one would argue from such historic examples that the teaching of science is impossible.

Whether waiting on the visitation of inspiration is a romantic nonsense which serves the circular logic of the canon in making ineffable the wall which divides inside from out (no-one asks the uncanonised how they came by their inspiration), or whether it is a permanent and universal condition of aesthetic practice (which happens likewise to serve the canon in this manner) is a moot question. The issue ultimately resolves in asking whether there is aesthetically any plausibility in the claim of meaning to mean and whether practice can be in any sense intended. If formal learning served merely the function of providing a background from which, in an effortless and relaxed state, necessary connections might be made and from these theories advanced, this formality would yet remain indispensable. There is every reason to believe it plays a greater role than that. We do know that whether or how often those inspirational moments out-of-the-arbitrary come to individuals, they are certainly prepared for, in the sense that they are the result of a cultural sentience (that is of right connections) which, to the extent that they are canonised, prove (with hindsight) to have been the result of, and in themselves constitutive of a kind of training.

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The *I Ching* (*Book of Changes*) counsels: "The teacher must wait to be sought out instead of offering himself: this is the correct relationship in education" (Wilhelm 8). And Plato, in "The Seventh Letter", likewise writes:

But if a man does not consult me at all, or evidently does not intend to follow my advice, I do not take the initiative in advising such a man, and will not use compulsion to him, even if he be my own son. (Plato 804)

Let us accept the most pessimistic assumption, for instance that which states one cannot teach anybody anything. At least we acknowledge that, however heuristical the processes were by which it was learned, the fact is, as evidenced by the presence still with us of what the canon needs to accept as poetry, that the making of poetry has been learned

because poetry has been made, and acknowledged as such, even if by a logic which wishes to deny poetry's process. To claim beyond this, that learning itself is impossible, is to shroud in an impenetrable mystery all of the processes and practices by which any expression of knowledge comes into being.

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Bachelard, arguing against the twin perils of word play and didacticism, tells us that the true poet, avoiding these dangers, "plays and teaches" (Bachelard 28). The affinity of playing and teaching, and their being named in poetry as the one vocation, suggest, far from the doubts and ambivalences we have thus far considered, that poetry and its practitioners have a natural heuristic function; further that the teaching (if we allow this conception) and play in poetry live out the reversibility (of which Merleau-Ponty wrote) of working on the wrong side of one's material. The affinity of such a two-sided activity for the expression of an ethics of presence is suggestive of the primacy Heidegger attributes to poetry in the matter of dwelling and in the means of allowing: "we are to think of the nature of poetry as a letting-dwell" (Heidegger 215).

A heuristics of allowing (allowing for instance what de Certeau calls a perruque of writing) might entail the reversal of various conditions which in life otherwise militate against creative work. Such licence to play might involve encouraging the presence to a waking life of dreams and daydreams, encouraging a reversal of the psychic topography which allows secondary processes to dominate, allowing irony more than a moment, allowing a metonymic reversal of the rule of metaphor, allowing chance and accidents; in short, a freer play of tropes, our travel on the wrong side of the track. Perhaps most importantly such a licence would allow the processes by which poetry comes into being, rather than those only of a canonised writing, to assert their natural connection with the unfolding of life in speech. Kenneth Koch, an early exponent of workshop methods in poetry teaching, and in a variety of settings with different age groups, etc., suggests in *Teaching Poetry Writing in a Nursing Home*:

The teaching was based on the assumption that there is no insurmountable barrier between ordinary speech and poetry and its aim was to help students move, easily and with confidence, from one to the other. (Koch 7)

I hope to follow Koch, in favouring the naturalness of such a blurring and the refusal of that conventional deixis which renders the presence of canonic objects in a here-and-now apart from practice.

Pedagogy and Liberation

In the case of both heuristics and poetics, we deal, in the terms Lyotard has established, with a differend between unintelligibles. It is not a peculiarity of the writing classroom that its business revolves around a differend. Rae Desmond Jones' poem "Decline and Fall" demonstrates the everyday differends on which native teacher and student collaborate in remaining unintelligible to each other:

i hate them
the truth is out! & they hate me.

them, the barbarians in baseball hats,
twisting in chairs lined up in artificial order,
and carving their loathing on the tabletops.

do you know why the roman empire fell? i ask.
who cares? a boy giggles.
that is the reason, i say.

you are old & fat, they say.
they are young & fat, I don't say.
because i don't want them to get healthy.

they can stay ugly and stupid so i can despise them.

why envy the awkward root they didn't have
or their perfect wet dreams pearling on the television screen?

outside the aluminium rimmed window
a crow strops his beak against a tree trunk
so that it will be sharp to dig
soft white worms from the dark earth.
i yearn for that brutal freedom.

the students resist my will although their heads bow,
broken for a second.

the room constricts us all.
i almost say get out.
go back to your bad videos & your hopeless dreams:
be unemployable.
daub graffiti on trains
& put as many needles in your arms as you want.
die if it seems romantic.

let there be war between us.

(*Education* 19)

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Paulo Freire in his influential (1970) work, the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, argues for a model of education as liberation which ties together many of the catch cries of progressive education in the sixties and seventies. He argues for a key role for consciousness raising:

Men emerge from their submersion and acquire the ability to intervene in reality as it is unveiled. Intervention in reality - historical awareness itself - thus presents a step forward from emergence, and results from the conscientization of the situation. Conscientization is the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence. (Freire 81)

For Freire what unites these processes is the genuine learner centring we have come to associate with the rhetoric of empowerment in the classroom:

The important thing from the point of view of liberation education, is for men to come to feel like masters of their own thinking, by discussing the thinking or views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades. Because this view of education starts with the conviction that it cannot present its own program but must search for this program dialogically with the people, it serves to introduce the pedagogy of the oppressed, in the development of which the oppressed must participate. (Freire 81)

The notion of dialogue which Freire develops for his classroom has strong affinities with Bakhtin's notion of "the word shaped in dialogic interaction" (Bakhtin 76) and with the dialogic imagination Bakhtin proposes as characteristic of the heteroglot novel. For poetry and for an heuristic of its writing, the action Freire proposes perhaps entails Bakhtin's conception of "inner speech": "A word in the mouth of a particular individual is a product of the living interaction of social forces" (Bakhtin 58).

What Freire proposes is a "problem posing method - dialogical par excellence... constituted and organised by the students' view of the world, where their own generative themes are found." The use of such methods ensures that "the content thus constantly expands and renews itself." The teacher, whom Freire imagines in this dialogic method, is a member "of an interdisciplinary team", "working on the thematic universe revealed by their investigation." The task of such a "dialogical" teacher is to "'represent' that universe to the people from whom he first received it - and 're-present' it not as a lecture but as a problem". These methods are, for Freire, to be contrasted with the "anti-dialogical and non-communicative 'deposits' of the banking method of education" (Freire 91).

Inner speech and a dialogic method in composition may serve Freirean purposes in the case of the heuristic of the self-apprenticing writer. The condition of perpetual apprenticeship entails ceaseless recommencement and so the learning process with which poetry's apprentices have the strongest affinity is that of beginning to learn a language, the moment at which nothing is known and where there appears to be no direction. (This despite the injunction that poets understand as much as possible the manner of haunting of one's own words.) Though respectively imagining themselves as in those impossible positions before and after the advent of language, the language learner and poetry's apprentice both begin with a view, at a substance and process at once, which is equally dense and impenetrable - on the one hand because it is unknown, on the other because it is too well known. Editorial Note

First steps are the most difficult because they are always those of a prisoner. But they are those of a prisoner because they are not first steps. They are haunted by the means which bring them. They are made possible by whatever it is that haunts them, that which cannot be known by those who take the steps. One's first words in any language are clumsy strides across a narrow cell. There may be light outside but it is a long way off, and there are many gates to unlock to get to it. In such words one necessarily is mistaken. And one sees one is mistaken. This is why it is always

so difficult to get started, this is why there is often a long silent period (Dulay, Bert and Krashen 13-26) where the system of a language is assimilated receptively prior to attempts at production.

The beginner has plenty of reasons not to be confident, and whereas the adult learner of a new language can at least imagine from experience what fluency in the target culture might mean (in terms of the prospects of a sociability), the child learner, who sees around her/him communication in which s/he is only partly proficient, has only begun to develop an empirical and epistemological basis from which to guess, beyond trust, that s/he is entering a system that works or that will eventually serve purposes, not yet apparent, but which will be hers/his. And yet s/he is, from the outset, entering such a system; its purposes are becoming his/hers long before they are known or articulated. One does not succeed in separating a process of acculturation from a more general heuristic process.

The child watching the cartoon knows these animals for people, knows by their speech, for instance; is not for long deceived if ever there is a moment where s/he wonders whether the beasts of her/his own world will speak. S/he embraces the other, fictive world as s/he embraces the experience of her/his own world (indeed these worlds fit inside each other). S/he approaches these with a credulity more of the thief than of the one from whom a secret treasure is stolen. One is possessed and dispossessed of all manner of things out of one's understanding. The truth about Santa Claus is not much of a setback because one has already learned a little of the operation of truth. The fact of having not evolved a particular kind of meta-discourse does not place the child out of range of tropic effects. To speak, to listen, is to engage these:

That is why it is so difficult to say how someone learns: there is an innate or acquired practical familiarity with signs, which means that there is something amorous - but also something fatal - about all education. We learn nothing from those who say: "Do as I do". Our only teachers are those who tell us to "do with me", and are able to emit signs to be developed in heterogeneity rather than propose gestures for us to reproduce. (Deleuze 23)

The only pedagogical hope for a meeting of the heuristic and practice here imagined, is one which engages the reversibility inherent in a practice of doing with me. Such doing is not of necessity divorced from showing or telling or from the words by which these are achieved. It is in no way required to be a silence. In fact it is only in telling that the inner speech of anyone, including the maker of poems, literally comes to the other and must manifest in an effect on the world. Acts of learning and of poetry share this authenticity with the dialogic unfolding in which words unceasingly become, that they are performatives in which the ipseity of the world is practised. For Merleau-Ponty: "This ever-recreated opening in the plenitude of being is what conditions the child's first use of speech and the language of the writer as it does the construction of the word and that of concepts" (Merleau-Ponty 197).

It is the demand for authenticity which presses what has been called teaching in the direction of an apprenticing poesis which is practised in its own right, and not with any separate intention of passing knowledge on. It is an odd circumstance that, because of the perceived gap between real and teacherly intentions, we are able to distinguish a world as vast as that constituted in the industry of education, from another, real one. In fact, where teaching does take place all of its value is to the teacher, who is, in the moment of this work, avowedly a servant of the canon (even self-canonised) as the one possessed of that which is passed on. The same experiment is repeated year after year, the same question asked and the same answer pre-determined. So much of the naughtiness of the student who seriously wishes to learn for her/him self must be attributed to a desire to engage questions which truly are open, to participate in a free dialogue, rather than one which is pre-scripted in advance by a party who has worn down the wonder of not knowing until it presents with the obviousness of common sense. Merleau-Ponty writes:

And so it is not a question asked of someone who doesn't know by someone who does - the schoolmaster's question. The question comes from one who does not know, and it is addressed to a vision, a seeing, which knows everything and which we do not make, for it makes itself in us. (Merleau-Ponty 167)

If, as there certainly are, ways around the trap of this persona, then they involve activities other than teaching.

The unanalysed life may not be worth living, but there is a lot of it going on, both inside and out of the industry we name education, and it may be taken as constituting more or less the first fact of heuristics: that the path to the analysed life first consists of the flawed (impossible) practice by which we see what is unanalysed and what is beyond the scope of analysis. Thus we think of ourselves beginning without thinking and know in that trap we are caught.

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The maker of modern poems, by virtue of the inherently experimental nature of her/his work, can never reach fluency in that code by which language and society (discourse and its subjects) are forever making each other. Or rather the process by which s/he works is not able to be completed. This is what Bakhtin means by the "impossibility of closure" and by "unfinalisability" (Bakhtin 96). In this sense the poet deals with a legislative capacity which is never itself enacted, but which is rather an ever present latency in which the acts of poetry are constituted.

The maker of poems is driven by a necessity to understand, as is the philosopher, but, unlike the philosopher (whom Marx imagined before himself), also to unmake and remake the system which makes him /her. The maker of poems, in terms then of Shelley's legislator tag, lives out the fears Plato expressed in the tenth book of the *Republic*, and which Marx brought home to philosophy and its *raison-d'être*, in the Eleventh of the Feuerbach theses.

Merleau-Ponty tells us that the philosopher is unable to surrender to anything (Kwant 82). Poetic heuresis requires the opposite discipline, a greater bravery, that of surrender to anything, surrender everywhere at once: surrender of the self to the world's anonymity. Poetry is not fussy like religion, its belief (and its doubt) are scattered everywhere, are ever shifting. Those doubts and beliefs are the making foreign which poeisis entails, because it is perpetually concerned with the impossible task of at once breaking from and constructing the code in which it is made. Poetry, in this sense, as the failure of panopticism, tends toward an animist or pantheist acknowledgment of the multiple in the fact that they cannot be known (except by this totality on which we hang the sign definite article).

What is described here is not the activity of an elite but one in which the whole of humanity is automatically and perpetually engaged by virtue of the largely unconscious (or in Bakhtin's terms the largely unofficially conscious) process of communication. It cannot be helped, in other words, that the code is recast and reconceived in the process of its use. Struggle cannot be helped. Nothing stands still in language, in society or in the subjectivities formed by and forming these. We speak in order to be understood and we speak with the words we are given.

The difference in the case of poetry is that here consciousness is drawn to these (words we are given) not as a metalanguage (as in the case of philosophy, sociology, etc), not as reflection (as in the case of a language science), but in the material of the work itself. Thus it makes in-dwelling all attempts at transcendence.

To say and to be understood saying that which has not yet been said is to bring to awareness those ways the world works which are at once most vital and most well concealed. It is the transcendent work of uncovering immanence. And it is impossible work, because it is impossible in these conditions to achieve any measure of sense - to know what to say or to be understood. Poetry lives in the reversal of flows between the beyond and within of selves. Nevertheless a vital poetry derives its life and power from the world making work of unravelling the life and power of the world. It is here that representation and the injunction to change the world co-incide, in a practice which is only one to the extent that it is heuristic; which is only ours to the extent that it remains foreign to us.

Because we need to understand power and its maintenance in terms of consent as well as coercion, the aims of a vital poetry cannot be far from Freire's hope to empower people to "emerge from their own submersion".

It is in these senses that we are able to speak of poetry as world therapy, as a writing cure and as a practice of laughter.

Liberation is the middle way between a therapeutic and a canonic heuristic of writing.

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The landscape described here shows no other map than one's own skin, a surface in and to which is lost all that would explain it. Here footsteps are felt as a tickling, a torment in which we cannot help but forget what we dig for or what we are climbing. Our haunting is such that the air is full of echoes, of voices, even our own, which though they can no longer be measured or understood, yet never can be said to have died completely away.

Lafcadio Hearn begins his volume *In Ghostly Japan* with the story of Bodhisattva and pilgrim climbing a mountain in the gloom, a mountain which turns out to be one of human skulls. Approaching the summit, the pilgrim becomes fearful, realising what the mountain is made of:

"I fear! - unutterably I fear!... there is nothing but the skulls of men!"
 "A mountain of skulls it is", responded the Bodhisattva. "But know, my son, that all of them ARE YOUR OWN! Each has at some time been the nest of your dreams and delusions and desires. Not even one of them is the skull of any other being. All, - all without exception, - have been yours, in the billions of your former lives." (Hearn 6-7)

It is on just such a mountain, that according to Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty 311): "The writer('s task)... is to change the life of signs, unaided and all by himself."

The effect of this task is to change the world.

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Kelen's current collection of poetry, *Green Lizard Manifesto* is reviewed in this issue of TEXT

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