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Intimacy and Making: Thinking Constellations of Consciousness and the Movements of Invention

This paper takes up the three terms—creativity, consciousness and intimacy—and positions them as possible ‘ultimate terms’. Inquiring into the use of these terms to garner approval, status or power within cultural contexts, the paper attempts to unpack them, and simultaneously to seek out any structural similarities in the ways that they operate. The term ‘creativity’ is deconstructed via a Derridean framework, wherein ‘inventiveness’ is posited as a more rigorous alternative in most cases. Consciousness is read closely in relation to its association with notions of awareness and ‘enlightenment’. And ‘intimacy’ is playfully explored as an alternative term for enlightenment, a manoeuvre which brings to the fore some structural assumptions about that which intimacy might comprise. The assumption of intimacy as a spatially-dependent notion is also interrogated. The paper contends that intimacy may involve an unsettling of spatial assumptions proper, and therefore not be simply a function of closeness or distance. It draws on Serres’ notion of the angel as messenger and as analogy for the preposition, indicator of position, but occupant of none. Finally an example from art practice is offered, one that arguably performs the terms intimacy and creativity at once: an epistolary adventure in poetry and photographs, called The Post Project.

Keywords: Consciousness – creativity – intimacy – angels – Derrida – spatiality


Who, if I cried, would hear me among the angelic orders? And even if one of them suddenly pressed me against his heart, I should fade in the strength of his stronger existence. For beauty’s nothing but the beginning of terror we’re still just able to bear, and we find it so bewitching since it serenely disdains to destroy us. Every angel is terrible.

From The first elegy, RM Rilke
(collaborative translation by current author and unknown)

In the first Duino Elegy of Rainer Maria Rilke (1912), the poem’s narrator wonders whether a person could withstand the embrace of an angel, and concludes that this is unlikely, since such an intimacy—if we can call it this—would involve a kind of perishing, a vergehen—a passing, or elapsing—in the presence of the angel’s overwhelming force of Dasein.
I’m not sure whether this poem can give us clues to the ‘how’ of intimacy, its cultivation, or its flash. Rilke, however, would certainly have us associate a certain kind of terror with closeness, raising the question both of intimacy’s horror, and also whether it does function simply as a degree of spatiality as such. Do we always think the quality of intimacy via a notion of proximity, or is this framing merely a metaphorical crutch, one that would conceal the awkward dearth of any adequate image for intimacy? Is it possible that intimacy is inconsistent with, or at least irreducible to, a simple concept of distribution in space? The narrator, however, does imagine being pressed against the angel’s heart.

In the paper that follows here, I am going to take up three terms that I consider deserving of a certain ambivalence. The first quality that might justify their being examined together is that they can all be classed, after the definition of Weaver, as ‘ultimate terms’ (cited Williamson 2010: 6). Such terms wield power as rhetorical absolutes and are rarely contested by those that use them. They are those terms to which ‘the highest respect is paid in a culture and to which the populace appears to attribute the greatest sanction’ (Weaver, cited Williamson 2010: 6). In addition, I will add, such terms often are poorly defined, or even grossly misunderstood. It is probable that they actually depend on this state of being under-theorised for their very operation as ‘ultimate terms’. For the purposes of this paper, these three terms are: creativity, intimacy and consciousness.

Now, I am choosing to include these terms under the rubric of ‘ultimate terms’ because I want to interrogate whether they always or mostly operate within culture as leverage for status, or to facilitate a kind of seduction (following Weaver’s definition). I could, however, also ask whether they involve an internal ‘movement’—within their very operation—which would make them more akin to another group of terms that the practice of deconstruction has identified. This other category of terms has been identified by Derridean writings as having a strange logic inherent to their functioning. This latter group of signifiers can be identified due to their functioning because and not in spite of their capacity to signify two opposite things at once. In other words, they display an unavoidably paradoxical choreography in their chains of signification. Examples abound: the supplement (Derrida 1997: 144ff), the hinge (Derrida 1997: 65), the pharmakon (Derrida 1981: 98ff), to name but several. These particular signifiers, identified by Derrida, embroil the speaker or writer in a doubled gesture. In using them, one ends up saying also the opposite of what one intended saying. The supplement is always more and less; the pharmakon both heals and contaminates; the hinge marks a site of both closure and opening. Derrida, one might say, drew attention to these terms, because they highlight the agency of writing (in its most broad sense), which slips out of the monopolised hold of its ‘user’. Were a speaker/writer to hope to banish the term ‘pharmakon’, for example, to the valorised pole of the binary, she would find that this hope evades her. We may speak of ‘medicine’ assisting us, but there is much to suggest that our medicines are poisoning us and our environment in the very moment of their also being healing (see Buhner 2002). This possibility of a doubled gesture may also apply to the terms at issue in this paper.

My contention will be that the three terms—consciousness, intimacy and creativity—are at any rate worthy of closer attention. Consequently, I intend to query the possible structural similarities between intimacy and creativity, and to call on the notion of consciousness to assist in clarifying this inquiry.

The shock of intimacy
Now, it is no radical manoeuvre to compare intimacy and creativity at their structural levels. I imagine that many practising artists would find this comparison obvious, and neither
contrived nor surprising. The experience of making, as I will call it, and perhaps the precious moments of intimacy that people might experience in a life, can, at least, feel analogously fragile, difficult to stage or to coerce into reoccurrence, and simultaneously desirable and frightening. As Rilke’s narrator of the poem deftly tells us: *for beauty’s nothing / but the beginning of terror we’re still just able to bear ...* (1975: 4).

Beauty and terror. Rilke does not use the German term *Angst*, as in a Heideggerian ‘anxiety’. The latter, the German philosopher tells us, is clearly an intra-worldly phenomenon, arising as it does from what is internal to Dasein, as a consequence of Dasein’s own structure—hence the quip ‘existential angst’ which has passed into mainstream usage, and which describes perfectly an anxiety that arises as an (internal) result of being alive, and not due to an (external) threat to that life.

To talk of ‘intimate terror’ borders perhaps on the oxymoronic. Intimacy is mostly valorised in culture, operating, as I’m contending, as an ultimate term. For it to be a ‘terror’ might involve, arguably, a threat to self and the categories that sustain it. Terror, according to Terry Heller, is a fear that harm will come to oneself (cited Holte 1997: 24). Heller goes on to say that ‘horror’, on the other hand, can be see to involve fear for another. If intimacy is not an *angst*, for Rilke, but possibly both a terror and a horror, my question is whether its instance involves a reframing of the very distinction between inside and outside, a non-obedience to the normal rules of this spatial classification. Furthermore, if intimacy is such a reframing, does this then destabilise the self and the other with whom the intimacy is arising, and therefore threaten to harm both ‘selves’, not from the outside, but from the evaporation of outside/inside as steadying registers altogether?

What kind of intervention into the spatial might the term ‘intimacy’ be a shorthand for? As we asked earlier, what does intimacy have to do with spatiality? I raise this notion since in the case of many cultural artefacts that which purports to represent intimacy may often be communicated in spatial terms. In film, bodies may come closer together. Faces may be drawn to one another in a moment of longing. The intimacy of lovers may be shown via their physical nearness to one another in wider social settings. But already these examples, although ubiquitous, ring hollow. It may be possible, I would then argue, that intimacy involves a disregard for, or reconfiguration of, spatial categories, not a reaction against (and therefore reinforcing of) such divisions. Pure proximity, or an alteration at the spatial register, will not make intimacy appear or disappear. Perhaps one way of thinking intimacy might be that it can reorganise certain criteria that pertain to, or derive from, the spatial. Intimacy, then, not a function of closeness or distance, but rather a relation to space recast and reinvented.

Rilke in his poem employs the adjective *schrecklich*—as in terrible, horrible, even awful—framing beauty as the still-bearable edge or beginning of this quality. The German verb *erschrecken* clearly references the notion of shock (a connotation which is not transparent in the various English translations). The terrors and horrors that are *schrecklich* are ones that shock us, that is, ones which constitute a sharp disruption to our everyday worlds, ones we are unable to integrate and make sense of. This calls to mind a certain definition of trauma. Caruth (1991) has pointed out that trauma is constituted by an original missing of the experience of the purported source of the trauma. The person suffering from trauma precisely did not have an experience that they could have made into any kind of narrative (pleasant, neutral or distressing). This rupturing of a sense of continuity then begins to be displayed in a repeated and seemingly counter-intuitive ‘reliving’ of the missed (distressing) scene, in an attempt to live it *again but for the first time* (Caruth 1991: 191-92). Rilke will depict an
embrace with an angel, and predict the shocking nature of this constellation. Would the narrator, were the embrace to have happened, have been able to experience such an intense encounter—pressed to the angel’s heart? Or would he have missed the experience, even as it happened, and then spent his remaining years trying to relive its shock again but for the first time?

If shocks initiate a break, a rupture, something un-knittable into the known continuity, and if intimacy is in some way shocking, dare I say that, therefore, intimacy would not be ‘natural’, if we take up Badiou’s definition of nature as that which concerns ‘the intrinsic normality of a situation’ (2007: 128). Another way to describe this is to say that ‘natural’ here would pertain to the endless-same, the register in which we, and everything around us, are already accounted for and in (our) place, and in which a certain kind of change or newness is precluded. Intimacy, to summarise, is arguably not natural and may constitute a particular kind of rupture of lived narrative unfoldings.

But we still don’t really know what we are talking about. Intimacy, technically, functions as a noun; however, it is one of those nouns that seem to imply a state or quality determined not by some explicit content but rather by a kind of process, operation, or ephemeral juxtaposition. It would seem that this noun couples quite exclusively, and mostly with verbs that imply verbal constellations to follow, that is, which enchain other verbs. The word ‘intimacy’ in a sentence then, resists stable and solid predicates. To say: intimacy is a nice day; intimacy is a warm bed; intimacy is the proximity of bodies, etc. is all a bit vapid. Intimacy (like our other two terms) isn’t a thing, and can’t be assigned qualities that we assign to things.

What I am suggesting here is that intimacy is a term that describes a particular kind of movement or structure. It is a noun for naming a (grammatically) verbal situation. Verbs always also have an infinitive form, and this infinitive form forces into thought a register that precedes both temporality (via the tense) and spatiality (via the positioning or agency implied by the pronoun). If intimacy then has something to do with what I will—as a shorthand—call an ‘operation’, we can move towards asking what might be the criteria of intimacy.

Intimacy and consciousness
But, let me divert this discussion with a curious anecdote. Many years ago, I attended a zen sesshin, which is a kind of silent retreat over eight or so days. During the day one sits for many hours, and in the evenings there can be a kind of talk or lecture. On this particular occasion, the teacher made an observation that I found very interesting. He said that the character in the original Chinese texts, which is conventionally translated into English and other European languages as ‘enlightenment’ would arguably be more accurately translated as ‘intimacy’. Now, unless it was an excuse for innuendo, or an attempt to make his talk more entertaining, this repositioning of a central term in philosophy, literature and so-called spiritual texts was to me very refreshing.²

The term ‘enlightenment’ in English has two obvious associations. Firstly, it refers to a period in history beginning arguably around the late 17th century with Voltaire, and thereafter to the gradual process whereby the belief in God, and the dominance of the theological order of things, was unsettled, challenged or usurped by the new reign of reason. In German, French, Italian and English, the term contains an explicit or implied reference to light. For a culture to be in an enlightened period is for it to have emerged, ostensibly, from obscurity,
having thrown thought and knowledge into the shining field of reason’s clarity, clear of the obfuscation of church power and of folk superstitions.

The second register, related to the first, but wider than it, is the term enlightenment when used to designate a particular kind of spiritual event, or state. The term is mostly encountered in texts of mysticism, and operates in a plethora of ways to designate the subtleties of belief, doctrine and experience in vast and varied traditions. Sometimes the term is replaced by the English term ‘realisation’. This paper is not the forum to go into detail about this term; suffice to say that I would like to sketch a workable picture of this map of overlapping nominations, and that to which they arguably point.

Curiously, in German, the single term in English bifurcates into more specificity. The period of history is the Aufklärung (almost ‘the clarifying’, or ‘bringing to light’), whereas the experience associated with sages and ascetics is Erleuchtung (the ‘lighting up’, ‘the illuminating’). For the purposes of our inquiry, let us limit our interest to the latter: enlightenment as Erleuchtung, the term that generally translates a Chinese character, which the zen teacher claimed might be better translated as intimacy.

Now, the third term that has attracted my ambivalence, and therefore has been corralled into my ruminations here, is the frustrating, infuriating, quicksilvery, flaky, pseudo-scientific term ‘consciousness’. Now, of course, I do jest a little ... However, consciousness is at least as guilty as the term intimacy of being open to manipulation and misuse, or use in the absence of inquiry. And following my anecdote just now, the word demands our attention, if only because, I contend, that in the popular perception, the experience or state of so-called enlightenment, is presumed to have something to do with consciousness and purportedly higher states of the latter. ‘Mindful awareness’—another related notion and actual practice stemming from Buddhist thought—is now, for example, a technique that has been taken up in corporate spheres to produce more productive, and—wait for it!—more productive, or creative workers. But what do we mean when we say ‘consciousness’? What kind of attention does it involve?

Before I take up these questions, let me recapitulate and restate the field of the inquiry thus far. There is an inquiry into intimacy, per se. Then, we discover that the seemingly unrelated happening or state known in English as ‘enlightenment’ might be more aptly translated as ‘intimacy’. Finally, this so-called state or happening of enlightenment is often associated in lay circles with a shift or change in consciousness; however, it is debatable whether we really know what we mean when we apply the term consciousness, almost as a sleight of hand, to this other poorly understood phenomenon, and mobilise the two terms from that point on, in parallel. Or more critically, if we use the word consciousness to mean what we think it does, then can we explain why we then assume enlightenment (or indeed, in the case at hand, intimacy) would be an intensification of such a thing?

At this point, some might take issue with the trajectory of my argument. Consciousness, they might contend, should not be ranked in this triplet of dubious ‘ultimate terms’. It is a scientific notion, well documented and theorised, and it means something very specific. Yes, yes it does. But, to be facetious, do we know what that meaning means? This question flirts with the tautological, but I will argue, so does our popular definition of this tricky term.

Antonio Damasio, the renowned psychologist and neuroscientist, writes quite simply that consciousness is generally defined as ‘an organism’s awareness of itself and its surroundings’.
Need it be pointed out that consciousness here is defined by awareness. The questions then ensues: what is awareness?

I do not wish to enter into an impossible discussion, although I suggest that we are already at the threshold of one, and it is one inevitably encountered when one ponders this strange and quotidian beast that we all presume to know and yet fail to speak about coherently (this is reminiscent of that other beast, namely time, and for similar reasons. As Augustine explains so aptly, we all know what it is, but when asked cannot say what it is).

**Creativity, or invention**

I would like to give us a rest from this anguish, and address finally, the third ‘ultimate term’ of this paper. Creativity, although also frequently exploited as a malleable notion in lay contexts, has been theorised quite succinctly by Jacques Derrida. He argues that often, when we use the term creativity, the term invention would be a more rigorous choice, and he has provided six crucial criteria that need to be fulfilled in the case of the latter.

In the first chapter of his collection of 1987, *Psyche—the invention of the other*, Derrida argues in favour of the term invention, over and above creativity, since, as he explains, the latter is more appropriate for acts of creation *ex nihilo*, in other words theological creations, or for the realm of reproduction (one creates a child, for example). For the purposes of art, science, and ideas in general, it is invention that is at issue, and Derrida (1987: 11ff) tells us that this demands six criteria:

1. the invention’s illegality;
2. the invention as a category pertaining to form and composition;
3. the paradox of the invention;
4. the iterability of the invention;
5. the invention as both a first and last time; and
6. invention as ‘finding there for the first time’.

In order to qualify as inventive, the happening must rupture law, or some kind of symbolic order. Invention as process also must introduce something that until that point had been precluded by the existing structures (social, conceptual, political, artistic, and so on). An invention also does not involve the creation of substance, per se, but rather pertains to new forms for existing substance, and is an innovation at the level of composition, rather than matter. The invention, too, has a paradoxical structure, and I will say more on this later. The invention is also both a singular occurrence and also iterable. That is to say, it sets up a pattern or structural possibility that can be reproduced. Finally, it is slightly counter-intuitive since it can be the most elegantly stated via the syntactically awkward formula ‘finding there for the first time’.

As artists, we may or may not be engaged every time we write in a process that adheres faithfully to each of Derrida’s criteria. But even the accepted term ‘creative writer’ (in Derrida’s lexicon, *inventive writer*), for example, implies that there is a particular kind of writing activity that is accompanied by paradox, rupture, conformity and disobedience, by something thinkable but also unrelated to the compulsory movements of quotidian binary or goal-oriented rumination.

To take up my term ‘making’, it might be more accurate to identity a dual aspect in its structure. Making would include both the invention event, and the practice that precedes and
follows it. Invention cannot be coerced into happening, but—as the popular adage goes—the artist must show up diligently in case it does. Making, then, might designate both the aspect of invention that is not predictable and which slips from the grasp of description and representation, while also naming the labour surrounding that event, a practice of sorts, which cannot aim towards anything, yet is not devoid of intentionality. These two aspects, as any artist might testify, do not adhere to any firm logical sequence. The arrival of invention is not always dependent upon a prior labour, and invention does not always come about as the necessary result of steady or dedicated labour. Causality, as we are used to presuming it, is—in the case of invention—suspended, destabilised or rendered paradoxical.

This deserves, I contend, a parallel exploration of the way that the zen tradition has typically framed the unthinkable occurrence (at times mistakenly understood as a state, whereas in fact it may itself dissolve the categorical membrane between states and movements) that the west has awkwardly termed ‘enlightenment’. Dogen, a 13th century poet and philosopher, introduces the coupled notion of practice-realisation. Whereas so-called dual spiritual traditions (such as Theravada Buddhism or Patanjali’s Yoga sutras) make a clear delineation between the labour of practice and the goal of enlightenment, with one causally portrayed in the texts as leading to the other, Dogen’s contribution acts to unsettle this assumption. By framing the two as a kind of deconstructed binary, which is in a constant relation of contamination—the one into the other, with no starting or stopping point within time, practice for Dogen is realisation. No logical order is assumed between them; rather, any hint of ordering tends to evaporate as the activity of practice becomes identical to the whatever or the however that realisation might seek to name.

What intimacy is the intimacy of realisation?

To theorise about zen is always risky. It risks being offensive to those who practice, who will say that any theorisation will by its very nature miss the point. It risks appearing flaky to those who don’t practice and who perhaps doubt its scholarly relevance, or find zen’s claimed resistance to intellectualisation a likely cover for cultishness. Perhaps I don’t wish to theorise zen practice, but I wish to use texts from its tradition as a provocation and springboard for choreographies of thinking—specifically paradoxical ones. Zen, is the encounter, par excellence, with paradox and particular kinds of aporia in thought.

In the 13th century, Dogen writes the following piece of poetry or philosophy, depending on one’s reading:

To study the … way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualised by myriad things. When actualised by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of enlightenment remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly. (1999: 36)

Sadly, this is not the forum in which one could do justice to this excerpt, whose importance has arguably reverberated through the last seven centuries in both eastern and western philosophical traditions. Needless to say, it is beautiful, baffling and frankly instructive. It speaks about the practice of studying the ‘way’. And, if we accept, Damasio’s simple definition of consciousness, Dogen does speak to it, at least, obliquely in the first fragment. Actualisation, it would seem, involves a studying of the self. This initial instruction aligns with what I identified earlier as the popular conception of what enlightenment might entail. To study the way involves applying one’s attention to oneself as object. This study, then, is self-reflexive. One studies the one who studies. See, one might say, zen is exactly about
consciousness in the way we’ve previously thought it! Then, however, we reach the second sentence of the quote: ‘to study the self is to forget the self’. Why would placing attention on the self, studying it, then involve forgetting the self? Studying the self does not, it turns out, amount to greater awareness of the self. Dogen says that it amounts to a forgetting, or paradoxically, to a lack of interest, a dropping out (‘away’).

At this point, I would like to introduce another theorist of consciousness, the author of *Gödel, Escher, Bach* (1979), Douglas Hofstadter, who in a more recent book, *I am a Strange Loop* (2007), makes a very simple point about what we are understanding when we think we understand consciousness. Hofstadter says that when we are attributing to a creature a more developed capacity for consciousness (he compares a mosquito with a human), what we are really intuising is the density of awareness loops of which this creature is capable (see for example 2007: 80). Humans, we might argue, are very busy with constantly perceiving themselves, and this density of ‘looping’ is what forms their strong sense of ‘I’-ness. Now, I admit that we are still not saying really what awareness is, and I don’t think this can be solved here today. However, what I want to point out is the link between Hofstadter’s clear definition, and Dogen’s slightly baffling instruction about studying the ‘way’.

Most crucial in the translation, to which we have access here, is the absence of terms that would imply causality or any temporal unfolding. The sentences are linked, in so far as the final term of the preceding sentence is the first term of the next sentence. However, there is an absence (in this English translation) of logical connectors like ‘then’, ‘so’, ‘since’, which surely would have been translated from the original, had they been there to begin with. To study the way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualised by myriad things … It almost implies that these activities are simultaneous, or at least not logically sequential in any typical way. The terms are linked with the copula ‘is’, a verb of equivalence, one might say. Causality quite simply does not figure.

Is it here that we encounter the flaw within the non-paradoxical approach to consciousness offered to us by popular science or lay assumption? Could consciousness be both awareness and a forgetting that is at once that awareness, the so-called consciousness that we associate with enlightenment being a kind of forgetting, and forgetting being paradoxically something triggered by a concentrated practice of attention?

Dogen will claim, in a way strange for western ears, that with this the body and mind drop away—all bodies and all minds. We study the self, which is to forget the self: there is something happening in the intensification of this ‘looping’ (a process which would be assumed to affirm and produce ‘self-ness’) whereby instead a forgetting occurs. Does the act or practice of consciousness (which I will remind us we still don’t understand) becomes so dense that it eclipses the ‘what’ upon which it concentrates, and simply remains, as pure verb?

Let me bring us back to our initial inquiry, which involved the term intimacy and ask, following this discussion, how this triplet of ultimate terms now stands. The happening analysed very briefly above is usually referred to as enlightenment, and according to the framing argued above, involves a paradoxical operation wherein the looping (or recognition of self) that normally constitutes I-ness instead folds back and undoes that very identity, which in the Buddhist tradition is the source of suffering. Is intimacy—following my anecdote of earlier—also an apt framing of this manoeuvre, or related to it in any way?
The angel as messenger, angel as preposition

The narrator of Rilke’s poem speculates what it would be like to be embraced by an angel: a beautiful experience, since a terror we are still just able to bear. For my purposes here, I find this image to be a fertile opening onto the question of intimacy. Michel Serres has also written about angels, framing them as messengers (from the Greek), and associating them with the grammatical element of the preposition (see 1995: 8). An angel, as messenger, would constitute a medium through which things travel, neither a destination, nor an origin. Angels bring to the fore the ‘between’, or the relational. The angel is also arguably what logically evades the nominal.

So we can say that the preposition is like the messenger, who can be forgotten in the excitement of the message’s content. Prepositions, then, provide relational information within a sentence, and render a medium of presentation itself presentable. Prepositions make space tangible in a curious way. In their very numerosness, they somehow throw into relief the to and the from, the near and the far, the above and below. They demonstrate position, of course, but also movement and direction.

German is a good example of this, since the same preposition will demand a different case, depending on whether the preposition pertains to something moving or being static. For the former it usually demands the dative case, and in the latter, the case needed is the accusative. For something to be hanging on the wall (as a static state) is an der Wand; for something to be in the middle of being put on the wall, it is an die Wand. The same preposition here—an—is able to indicate a state, a direction of movement and also a relation between an object and the wall.

This grammatical situation, and the concept I am connecting with it, make me more curious about our relation to position in space, and to spatiality somehow mapped via notions of position and also vectors of directionality.

Let me offer a pragmatic example that might throw some light on this musing and its plausibility. Many body practitioners (dancers, yogis, movement-workers, in general) have come to realise that the imagined point of view from which one ‘sees’ one’s body during the work (and this point of view, judged objectively, is a ‘fiction’ …) has a tangible effect on the outcome of the work or observation. Sometimes included under the umbrella of what is known as ‘ideokinesis’, this technique and its understanding bring to light the fact that from different perspectives different information, and indeed different results/perceptions/feelings/corporeal outcomes will actually emerge. If I imagine approaching my body from a ‘gaze’ of the front-moving-towards-the-back at specific points along the front body, I will be able to access a part of the front side of the spinal cord, otherwise buried to perception. And it is not just a mental image that is provoked (a kind of wishful cognitive evocation) but rather actual sensation, located specifically at that site. Such practices call to mind Dogen’s fragment above. In other words, if we study positionality intensely, then it may paradoxically fall away, leaving that, out of which it arises, momentarily accessible.

Might this prepositional uncovering also pertain to Derrida’s invention and his sixth criterion? Mobilising the strange logic of the preposition (that angelic, chimeric, no-thing-like grammatical register), is it possible that a ‘finding there for the first time’ arises? If by creativity, we normally mean an inventiveness of perspective, of a possibility always there but eschewing the register of representation, then Serres’ angels may have something to offer,
and we must remember, they offer their ‘something’ not nominally, but rather via relationality, the delivering of messages. Angels, to put it succinctly, make relationality—something normally invisible to the building blocks of grammar, or to the world, as that register of representation—appear.

**An intimate example**

I was prompted to write this paper after a friend took note of a certain intimacy that he perceived in a collaborative creative project of poetry and text. The friend’s observation was apt. The work arose out of a relationship that was unusually marked with what might be called intimacy, and this seems to have been palpable in the resultant artefact. The project was a simple game of generative tag, toggling between a photo and a four-line stanza, and taking place between a dear friend and myself (the work can be viewed at [www.thepostproject.org](http://www.thepostproject.org)).

The work did not aim primarily at quality, although when this occurred it was naturally pleasing. It was more an attempt to practice within a clearly specified framework, to work quickly, and with each contribution offering a response to what preceded it, along with a new thread for the continuation of the conversation. It was not to be an indulgence in agonising, but rather a discipline of swiftness, preferring flaws to rumination. By concentrating on the specifics of a photo (in my case) or a stanza (in hers), and by not at all aiming to reveal or share anything intentionally, an intimacy did seem to emerge paradoxically, out of a two-fold looping of attention (to recall Hofstadter’s conception). In reverse, perhaps of Dogen’s suggestion, by studying the artefacts on offer, we also studied the selves involved. Here is an example of what was produced. (The photo to which it responded can be viewed at the site cited above, under the name ‘Crypt’, as can the photo that it subsequently inspired.)

> tears squeezed hot like berries, our
> skin is a crypt with breathing walls.
> these face-rains come so delicately sour.
> bells on a hillside, we are small sounds travelling.

What was interesting and shocking about the practice of this correspondence, were the elements in one’s own work to which the other responded. The response documented a seeing that perhaps was unexpected, revealing a perspective on each artist’s work that was precluded to the maker. Since we were not speaking directly to each other, but only responding to the artefact produced in the last instance, a candidness was facilitated by the rules of the collaboration that the authenticity of presence would have inhibited otherwise. In the process, each of us was seen (or at least our work was), and this created an uncanny experience of intimacy, not just for us, but seemingly also for those who viewed the project.

**Conclusion: intimacy and spatiality**

> Ach, wen vermögen wir denn zu brauchen? Engel nicht, Menschen nicht,
> und die findigen Tiere merken es schon,
> daß wir nicht sehr verlässig zu Haus sind
> in der gedeuteten Welt.
> (Rilke 1975: 4)
Ah, who can we turn to, then? Neither angels nor men, and animals in their ingenuity already know, we’re not comfortably at home, in this interpreted world.

I do not claim to know much about intimacy. It seems to be a constellation that arises like a kind of grace, but which might also not be thwarted if accompanied by a certain practice or if approached with a species of gentle intentionality. It would pertain to the between—not being marooned in the stable entities of nouns, and in a quotidian sense, the experience of not being reduced to a finite noun. Rilke has provoked me to associate it with the angel—who makes the medium of spatiality appear like a vision, hard to grasp—and with the possibility of perspective before something coalesces to a single position, space logically prior to our having to have a finite position in it, before a body, before any mind can know its own locus, and compare that to the locus of others.

Intimacy, I would like propose, might be spatiality remembering its infinity of positional possibility. This may oddly emerge through an intensified practice of studying the self—that single, distilled position. And this practice is different to an obliteration of all position, or no study at all.

Intimacy, then, might involve the possibility, offered to us by another, who bothers to see us, to enact a different gaze, one that we hadn’t known possible before, and that through the arbitrariness of position hinted at by this fresh point of view (perhaps one with no agenda, opening that angelic terror of pure message), our limited inhabiting of ourselves is rendered obsolete, drops away, and leaves us in the void of spatiality and relation prior to its coalescing.

This, as we know, is quite horrific. But we seek it out, nevertheless, when the reckless wisdom takes us.

Endnotes

1. See also chapter 1 of Sennett 2002 for a discussion concerning the spatialisation of the word ‘private’ from an historical angle.

2. A discussion of the original Sanskrit term ‘buddhi’ is an obvious tributary of this discussion. It is the subject of adjacent writings, but due to space constrictions, has not been included in this forum.

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