

Accommodating Others: The Role of Author as Medium

This article regards the role of the artist through the metaphor of a 'medium'. The analogy has been drawn in a myriad of ways by artists and critics for reasons not dissimilar to those that give the spiritual medium her title. The medium is the channel, substance or field through which a ghost manifests itself before the living. Notably more often female than not, she finds herself in between, or in the middle, of input and output, and makes an instrument of herself. Whether interpreter, go-between, or one 'possessed', the nature of her occupation has a peculiar consequence for the flavour of her personhood.

In her pop-cultural appearances, the medium's personal conscience is rarely seen to intervene in the seance; she serves irrespective of motives (which lie beyond the scope of her role). While the preparatory meditative trance and closed, humming eyes attest to great concentration and a collected mind, the twitches and shudders which eventually follow, and the fits and cries after that, become the mark of someone overcome, and of a usurped will. She has made her own person recede, accommodating a ghostly other in its wake. Like meditation, and perhaps like art, this achievement seems to come easily by accident and laboriously by design. But beneath the grip of horror conjured by the main event - the bursting presence of a silenced someone - other things might go through our minds as we watch what takes place. We might pity the medium for the torturous nature of her calling - a calling, not a choice. We might become anxious about the scarcity of soul-space within her body and the economy of consciousness that demands. In either case, we are led to wonder at the passive nature of the role. She may be a person who does everyday things and has everyday thoughts, but as a continual conduit of others' stories, her individuality and the sanctity of her interior life is compromised by the external spirits overpopulating and saturating it; films often represent this bombardment with the schizophrenic burden of 'hearing voices'. With experience, and as the role takes hold of her identity, it becomes something of an oxymoron to ask 'who'

the medium is, because her very role is defined by the practice of dimming down her own inner light.

Within the context of art, where the term 'medium' is typically associated with an artist's material means of production, this article cites instead those who have thought of the artist's person as part of the apparatus for mediation; not a separate peruser of it, but a tool among tools. The analogy of a medium casts the authority of the 'author' as a *passive* form of power that authorises, in effect, a relinquishment of the self, in order to 'make space' for someone or something else. The metaphor of the medium invites us to consider the artist as something which facilitates the playing out of an other's voice, negotiating foreign sentiments that seem external to their own person. By rendering the person as a kind of instrument, this perspective on authorship begets a line of questioning that speculates not only on creative processes, but also on a kind of physics of agency. Can a person become a medium for another form of agency? Does this practice require a preliminary act of 'making space' for the other, and to what extent is this space also shared or occupied by the author? Is it a joint occupancy, or a swap? And why is this spatial conceptualisation of personhood so pervasive in our psychic imagining of agency; is it illuminating or misleading?

The distinction between an 'active' versus 'passive' conception of the artist's role in creativity recalls familiar 20th century debates about originality and authorship, debates that are alive in the seminars of art schools today and which will probably be sustained so long as active and passive modes of authorship are believed to be mutually exclusive. Just as in the case of grammar, with its active subjects and passive objects, at the heart of this distinction is the question of 'who' drives the intentionality behind an artwork's apparently singular voice (is it the artist or some 'other?'). And encompassing this question is a larger one that asks 'who' drives the intentionality behind our own selves - how personhood works - since both artworks and personal artifacts (such as voice) stimulate in their audience the search for an originating agent upon which to pin responsibility, property and belonging.

Without directly engaging in that debate, or explicitly endorsing the author's role as 'medium', this article will simply attempt to appreciate a series of enduring historical

accounts that in some way attest to the need to 'disappear' the self in a creative act, in order to make room for something altogether 'other'. The longevity of this idea, reported in ancient as well as modern times, seems worthy of scholarly attention, yet its supernatural associations seem to deter rigorous consideration. This discussion will then allow me to speculate on the spatial conceptualisations that attend the notion of 'making room', and to consider the person as a spatial entity that requires room in which to operate. Again, this idea threatens to be naive, but has strong and lasting resonance, evinced, as will be seen, in (the English) language itself. This article therefore indulges both of these intuitions - the idea that the artist-person channels agencies beyond herself, and the idea that an agent is dependent on physical space - with the aim of either locating their fallacies or discovering their plausibility.

Being a Medium

"The landscape thinks itself in me", says Paul Cezanne in the beginning of the last century, "and I am its consciousness" (Johnson, 1993, pg. 67). The painter offers his consciousness to the landscape, and, like a stethoscope, amplifies its rhythms. His brushwork too, is characteristically rhythmic, as if he allows himself to be vibrated by the antics of the mountains and trees, recording their chatter through the seismograph of his hand. He is no longer the protagonist of his consciousness. The landscape has filled the chamber of his being, which the quotation invites us to imagine as a medium in which this external agent can enact itself. The comment reinforces for me what I otherwise intuit when looking at Cezanne's paintings: that those quivering strokes are more than an affectation, more than a gimmick of the times; they are a methodology.

Locally, each brushstroke seems identical enough to the others. They are not like fingerprints, not marks of identity, but something more like an homogenous alphabet of rods. These marks, devoid, in a sense, of a personality in themselves, are for the landscape to make of them what it will, by incrementally insinuating itself into the painter's consciousness and vibrating his hand. This process is itself enabled by the quality of these marks - as they have the physical characteristics conducive to someone

wishing to remain in a prolonged state of impressionability. They are short enough to be iterated quickly, thick enough to sacrifice precision in favour of the whole and thin enough to retain their modesty. They are translucent enough to be revisited and identical enough to democratise each change, rendering the painting indefinitely pliable. Together, the characteristics of these marks allow Cezanne to mechanize himself, their dimensions setting the framerate of the landscape's 'thinking'. Perhaps he even moves his hand to a metronomic beat as he paints, becoming, like the musical stave and time signature upon which music is written, a rhythmic surface upon which the landscape can inscribe itself. The brushwork records a methodology of *submission*. Not unlike the spiritual medium mentioned above, the artist's own account of the painting process renders him a passive subject to whom something is being done. Cezanne's comment might not merely be intended as a poetic turn of phrase about the to-and-fro dance of perception, but rather a more literal take on 'impressionism'. Does painting render him so impressionable as to become a conduit for a would-be agent, like a landscape?

“Impressed or Expressed?” is itself one of the guises of the 'passive versus active' question. Where expressionism in art historically evokes an agential directionality from inside to outside, projections of an inner state, impressionism affords the opposite: letting the outside in. As we will continue to see, thinking of an artist as a medium in or through which something takes place tends to suggest a *passive* mode of authorship. However, before encountering further examples it may be worth taking this distinction between active and passive modes of authorship with a pinch of salt, and bearing in mind that the imposition of a false binary only begets false debates. After all, just as Cezanne's landscape is sculpted by geological pressures, the artist that (actively) 'expresses' only does so through a mind/body apparatus shaped by external, biological-social climates. And just as Cezanne must work like a machine and go through pains to position himself (passively) in the path of impression, the artist that is 'impressed' upon is the architect of his submission, a decisive actor in the process. In other words, the 'passive versus active' question assumes in the first place a unidirectional conception of agency, comprised of a set of discrete agents either acting or being acted upon: subjects and objects.

Here we are beginning to see, and will continue to explore, how it would be possible to articulate, from the axioms underpinning such debates, a kind of presumed physics of agency - much as artist Andy Holden does in his *Laws of Motion in a Cartoon Landscape* - which reflects back to us some commonly held assumptions about the vectors, topologies and materialities of selfhood. Because debates on authorship predominantly centre on the 'direction' of intentionality (what is the source of the authoring and where is it directed?), they serve as a valuable repository of assumptions like these. As we explore further accounts of the artist-as-medium model and trace its legacy at least back to antiquity, some of these assumptions will become apparent enough to illuminate at least a few of these intuited 'physical laws of agency'.

As for how seriously we should take this quotation by Cezanne, any further speculation on the relationship between himself and the landscape might benefit from drawing a parallel back to the spiritual medium, and the state of being possessed. This brings us to the most curious aspect of the quotation - where the landscape is said to 'think itself' through Cezanne, as though it could not know or announce itself prior to the mediation of the painting artist. It is implied that the landscape must borrow Cezanne's consciousness to do this, but what does it achieve by 'thinking itself'? Does it see itself, as by being endowed with eyes; does it hold itself, as though having been given hands?

It's not so much a sensory faculty such as sight or touch which comprises Cezanne's gift. Rather, what the landscape gains by borrowing his consciousness is the *self-reflexivity* represented by the reflexive pronoun in 'thinks *itself*'. This class of words ('herself', 'myself', 'ourselves', etc) is a close relative of the possessive pronoun ('her', 'my', 'our'). What is special about reflexive pronouns and those beings capable of thinking them, is that the object of possession is a 'self' (e.g. it's *her* self, or it's *my* self).

Without a mediator, the landscape, though fully alive and indisputably present, is incapable of being *in possession* of its self. Indeed, where 'being' seems to be a condition shared by Cezannes and landscapes alike, *having oneself* seems to be a faculty relegated only to the domain of conscious beings. This diagnostic of consciousness as 'the ability to have oneself' is reflected in the English use of the term 'possession', with reference to lucidity. When somebody is 'possessed' ('had' by another), they are not themselves, or are

out of their minds. When someone is 'self-possessed' ('had' by oneself), they are alert and in control. When Cezanne beckons the landscape into the space of painting, the landscape does not gain eyes, or hands or a brain. It gains possession of its self. And if this notion of 'consciousness' were also a faculty of finite capacity that could be donated, or loaned out, then it would be conceivable to imagine the painting as the site at which the landscape finds itself, and Cezanne loses himself.

Although this eloquent quotation by Cezanne serves well to depict the artist as a medium, he is only one of many to describe creative practice in this way. Just over a decade after Cezanne's death, T.S. Eliot outlines his 'impersonal' theory of poetry in *Tradition and the Individual Talent*. This essay, which sets out to defend the function of 'tradition' in artistic originality and criticise the tendency at the time to favour those poets who 'least resemble anyone else', ends up turning from a concern with individual originality to devote considerable thought to the question of what role - if any - the individual or 'personality' does play in the process of art. Here Eliot argues that the talent of the ideal author lies - not in their ability to pour themselves into their work - but on the contrary, in their ability to facilitate, in their imagination, the playing out of various ideas, *without* the imposition of their own person; in short, that the best artists took care to remove themselves, as persons, from the creative equation. To this end, this essay seems to purport another variant of the 'medium' metaphor, in which, as was also the case with Cezanne, the 'person' seems markedly vacant, if not absent, in the act of authorship.

“The progress of an artist,” he writes, “is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality,” and “it is in this depersonalization that art may be said to approach the conditions of science.” He illustrates this idea by imagining the ideal author to be like a catalyst in a chemical reaction, enabling the coming-together of disparate, otherwise inactive elements, whilst remaining personally unchanged and absent from the final formula. This perspective on good creative practice, with its supposed impartiality, is said to approach the conditions of science because it is fundamentally experimental; motivated, not by a premeditated agenda, outcome or belief, but by the allure of discovery awarded to those who faithfully follow hypothetical unions to their unfettered conclusions. But this 'self-sacrifice' and this 'extinction of personality' seem like quite

harsh working conditions - unless, again, there is something misleading about how we think about persons in the first place. Eliot briefly touches upon this, but does not pursue the idea for long:

The point of view which I am struggling to attack is perhaps related to the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul: for my meaning is that the poet has, not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways.

I am sympathetic to this struggle. Both T. S. Eliot and I are trying resolve a paradox about authorship, that is, how a self-possessed person can be reluctant to take full credit for the art which they alone have made (or in Eliot's case, make something novel out of tradition). He champions, and I indulge in, the notion that the author is a medium, but both of us are led to wonder: why stop at 'author'? Is being a medium just a condition of being a person, and is a "medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways" a conceivable theory of personhood and not only authorship? Is this assumed 'substantial unity of the soul' getting in the way of a better understanding about the workings of personhood?

Eliot does not, as I am doing, derail his discussion of authorship to delve into matters of personhood, concluding instead that, "poetry ... is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality." Thus, for Eliot, authorship seems to entail a muffling of the self, to make way for other agents to play out their collective will within the space of the poet's mind. A good artist is in this case like a good scientist, impartial, privileging experimental practice and protecting it from variables which might compromise the conditions for novel discoveries: the ravages of political agenda and personal desires.

In more recent memory, Peggy Phelan notes of Cindy Sherman's photographs of herself that they allow her to "develop the human body's disappearance into the prop, the prosthesis", at which point we witness also "the mise-en-abyme of self-production and reproduction" (1993, p. 69). Rendering the body as prop or prosthesis recalls again the medium's practice of instrumentalising her self, inviting, inevitably, a kind of self-transformation. In an interview, Sherman describes the process as very much

impartial to her own tastes and predilections, recalling T.S Eliot's illustration of the ideal author. "I don't think of it as that literal to me," she explains, when asked whether her characters are a reflection of her own desire to become them, "when I'm doing the characters, I really don't feel like it's something that grows out of my fantasy, my own dreams" (2011). But if not hers, then whose?

Sherman's photographs of herself, taken under various meticulously composed guises, seem to render her at once anonymous *and* brimming with character. Beyond the bewitching attraction of the humanoid *trompe-l'œil* achieved by her miscellaneous disguises, and beyond the exquisite theatricality of these *tableaux vivants*, is the poignancy of her ubiquity; she is at once everyone, and no-one. When pacing through the rooms of one of her retrospectives, like the one held at the National Portrait Gallery in 2019, you can squint between photographs but still be left wondering, *where is she?* By some optical, forensic maneuver, you can try to outwit the displays and excavate her from some latent residue, some betrayal of continuity across the portraits beneath layers of dress-up craftsmanship. And sure enough there she is; again and again. But the continuity we extrapolate is not very reassuring, as with each fresh gaze we only seem to lose her further to some kind of everywoman. Tempting though it may be to play this game of catching the artist out, by spotting a slip-up in her illusionary images; the endeavour would prove sorely futile if it turned out that the photographs were not illusions at all. Such a sport would then yield only the most unsatisfactory reassurances: a real tooth, a bare leg, an eye, but still no Sherman.

The question of who or what is being channeled through the artist, if not some 'essence' of her own ideation, appears wherever the artist-as-medium metaphor is invoked, and it has yielded many answers. The very diversity of these answers, some of which I will soon mention, seems only to increase the mystery attached to the notion that an artist is in communication with some Other, an other which, like Cezanne's landscape, cannot seem to exert its agency - is all but absent - without the mediation of the artist as its instrument. Sherman makes an instrument of her body; not for herself, but apparently for something outside herself. In this way, her images become particularly vivid documents of her own self-estrangement.

This career-long experiment in split-second roleplay (for all that's needed is for some other character to come and replace her in the blink of a camera-shutter) recalls the practice of spirit photography - not the work of Victorian illusionists who doctored their photographs for the desired effect - but those ghost hunters who sought in earnest to capture the fleeting form of spirits. And although in this sense her task is equally arduous (Sherman has described the characters' staging, posing and capturing as exhausting); instead of searching haunted nooks and crannies, Sherman turns the camera at herself, and seems there, in her living self, to find more ghosts than she could ever hope to discover elsewhere.

You don't need to be an artist, or see an exhibition by Sherman, to gain an intuition about what self-estrangement might feel like. Nor would you need makeup, elaborate costumes or a wig. All you would need to do is look at yourself in a mirror for a prolonged period of time - longer than it usually takes to check up on your appearance. Like Sherman, you can point your own biological cameras at yourself and find ghosts behind your eyes. Often I am told that this is a very unsettling experience, gradually plunging the unassuming mirror-gazer from boredom, straight into a thrilling displacement of the self's centre of mass. The face you assume to know so well starts to look like someone else's, or nobody's at all; as when a word's correct spelling suddenly looks unnatural on a page. Looking deep into yourself, you may begin to wonder, *but where is she?* You notice the volume of your head, become conscious of the space inside of it and the peepholes punctured into it, and remember that you are a machine whose apparatus is defined by functions, processing, churning. Your face is the mask of a friendly robot, the supple skin a functional gauze exuding metabolic exhaust through its tiny pores. Somebody else could have easily worn this face; indeed that has already been the case and will be so in the future. It is uncanny. *Unhomely*. Defamiliarising. Sure enough, these qualities serve the horror genre well, but what is particularly unnerving, I think, about seeing ourselves in this way, is recognising in our reflection a being of potential, not of essence.

Phelan's reading of Sherman's work suggests that the artist's body becomes that instrument in which she generates a *mise-en-abyme* of potential persons, as if by placing herself in the path of two facing mirrors. In turn, the imagined retrospective

walkthrough is like being immersed in a kaleidoscope of has-beens (often Sherman's characters are inscribed with the pathos of expired celebrity). What I would add to this reading is a dampened emphasis on the illusions and trickery associated with mirrors and disguises, and a greater emphasis on how Sherman's condition in her work is enacted beyond art/artifice, in everyday life. The persuasiveness of the portraits, however subtle or caricatured, seem to tease the idea that any one 'self' must find itself entrenched in the performativity of always mediating something other, something which comes from 'outside'. Never quite fulfilling its goal. Because of this, I sometimes wonder whether Sherman's elaborate disguises are there to help persuade herself, rather than us; a kind of ritual for becoming a medium. What is surprising about the phenomenon of the 'everyperson', staged with craftmanship and artistic discipline in Sherman's practice, is that it can be found beyond art, in the silent permutations of a still face. We see in our prolonged reflection the person as a being of potential, not essence; an instrument that is nothing but a prop for the task of becoming.

Interiors and Exteriors

By diverse means, each of the artists mentioned so far adopt a more or less conscious methodology of depersonalisation that renders the self malleable and receptive to external qualities, 'spirits' or 'character'. Echoing these examples are a myriad more reports by creative practitioners from a wide range of backgrounds and eras that attribute their productivity to some external force, or at least attest to feeling some bafflement as to their own contribution to the work they have made. The renunciation of self as a part of artistic methodology is familiar to Maurice Blanchot, who claims that a writer is fated to “sacrifice himself for the work to become other” (2003, p. 216). Here, we are reminded also of Deleuze’s “virtual object”; an entity that “lacks its own identity” precisely so as to have the capacity to accommodate an alternate quality (1994, p. 152). One particularly compelling testimony is cited in anthropologist Alfred Gell’s *Art and Agency*, by an African carver speaking in the 1970s about the mask he has made:

I see the thing I have made [a Sande mask] coming out of the women's bush. It is now a proud man *jIna* [spirit] with plenty of women running after him. It is not possible to see anything more wonderful in this world. His face is shining, he looks this way and that, and all the people wonder about this beautiful and terrible thing. To me, it is like what I see when I am dreaming. I say to myself, this is what my *neme* [familiar spirit] has brought into my mind. I say, I have made this. How can a man make such a thing? It is a fearful thing that I can do [...] (Gell 1998: 46; d'Azevedo 1973: 148)

In turn, these recent notions seem to echo, in guises more or less intuitive to our modern sensibilities, ideas about authorship that date back at least to antiquity, and possibly long before that. Where the ancient Greeks attributed artistic craft to channeling the divine voices of the Muses, the biblical apostles reported that their hand had been guided by the Holy Ghost in writing the gospels. Anticipating the birth of experimental psychology, it is possible to trace a resurgence of this emphasis on inspiration in the mid-19th century, only, the divine is replaced by the unbridled forces of the unconscious (Burke, p. 99, n. 6). From there, the same idea appears in testimonies such as those mentioned above, at times taking on a register that is at once scientific and spiritual.

In Plato's *Ion*, Socrates claims that a great poet works at their best when they are 'out of their senses', or '*beside* themselves'; because that is the state in which they are most amenable to being possessed by exterior forces so as to be used as 'ministers' of the whims of some third party (Burke, 1995, pp. 14-18). Imagine then, an ancient poet getting ready to compose a verse. They step outside of their own body and wait, 'beside themselves', whilst a ghostly voice enters their vacated corporeal cavity and instrumentalises it for purposes unknown. After all; a muse, god, subconscious desire, brooding landscape or familiar spirit, or any ghostly agent for that matter, cannot enter a body that is already occupied with a lucid soul; it must be *vacated* first.

Across all these examples, the voice that speaks through the medium of the artist is attributed to different sources. But in each of them there is a sense that something came and went, through and by means of the artist as its 'minister', suggesting that somewhere on the person of the artist there was a space, and that it was filled and then emptied. The assumption that adequate *space* first needs to be made before this Other can enter,

inhabit or possess the medium of the artist, reveals a certain human fixation on the spatiality of personhood, complete with ideas about capacity, viscosity and spiritual matter. Together, these ideas form a set of presumed physical laws of the spirit which compel me to revisit old questions about the mechanics of personhood (its 'inside' and 'outside', its limits and permeability) before examining the consequent implications these assumptions have on our understanding of the role of the person in creative processes.

In *Art and Agency*, anthropologist Alfred Gell refers to a number of examples from around the world of artifacts supposed by its users to be imbued with some agency or spirit. Some of these artifacts are anthropomorphic figures, recognisable in that sense as persons - but some of them are not, some of them are utterly abstract objects. Yet a common design feature in all of them is that they tend to have some sort of orifice, or are hollow. Gell calls this the 'homunculus-effect', suggesting that animacy can be achieved in abstract figures "so long as the crucial feature of concentricity and 'containment' is preserved." (133). Here we confront the almost compulsive human instinct that an 'inner life' requires interiority - some interior space in which the implied kernel of personhood is housed.

In a certain sense, one would think that this interiority, this spirit, commonly conceived as 'immaterial', would have no use for physical space, and this is the crux of another familiar debate: the mind-body problem. Attempts to locate a soul within a body or witness it leaving a corpse have been unsuccessful, yet because the corpse looks blatantly devoid of something which its living counterpart once had, we have long been left struggling to account for the difference. The debate, if not resolved, was put to rest in favour of the 'materialist' view that the only empirically sound way for us to engage with the problem of locating consciousness is to at least assume the existence of a causality between 'body' and 'soul' within the bounds of our own physical world. A famous, if serially refuted, example of this endeavour was Duncan MacDougall's 1901 attempt to measure the weight change in human bodies at the moment of death, to ascertain whether the soul had a mass. At least it was refutable.

In what follows, I will adhere to this scientific maxim, and have no intention of dabbling in the hopeless alchemy of supernatural speculation. Even so, it cannot be ignored that the person as both a kind of ghost *and* a spatially, materially dependant entity is intuitively extremely pervasive, and not only amongst peoples whom we take to be our primitive predecessors; these intuitions are rife in modern languages spoken by our sophisticated, modernised, rationalised selves, as Marina Warner argues in *Phantasmagoria* (2006):

Mind-body dualism has been discounted (as in Gilbert Ryle's famous, scornful phrase 'the ghost in the machine') - for many reasons and after many long arguments - but it is still difficult to turn one's back on the deep hinterland behind the principle of animation: the difference between life and death depends on an *animus* or *anima* imagined to lurk within embodied personality. Even when we profess agnosticism if not unbelief in a supernatural order, we are the inheritors of much classical cosmology and medieval philosophy about spirit and soul - in unconscious ways and in common parlance. (p. 9)

In her book, Marina Warner excavates historically persistent metaphors and intuitions about the matter of the soul. From painstaking theological meditations on angelic bodies to the uncanny presence of animated wax models, the story she tells reflects that however ethereal the 'true' stuff of the spirit may be, humans have long associated certain material properties with spirit - such as air, cloud, light, shadow, reflection and then later film - even if only taken as crude approximations of, for instance, an angelic body. Where Warner goes on to trace a rich lineage of conceptions about spiritual matter as manifest in scientific and religious practice and traditions, here I wish to briefly highlight similar intuitions we hold about the *topology* of personhood, starting with an analysis of how this is reflected in 'common parlance'.

Both of the terms 'medium' and 'person' summon with them a notion of coordinates, positions and distance. In discussing this so far, I have made use of many prepositions implying a relationship with space, asking: What is the author mediating *between*? Where does this ghostly agency come *from*? How does it pass *through* the author? What is it that comes *out*? There's a certain mechanical pragmatism to this language, which

renders its subjects roomy and viscous: things take time to 'pass through' the artist's person and must labour to get out. The artist's person is a thing that is *here*, in relation to its potential possessor which comes from some indiscernible vanishing point *there*. Here we recall also the presumed 'unidirectional' vectors within subject/object, or active/passive relations in grammar, and similarly the 'agential directionality' implied by expressionist versus impressionist authorship mentioned earlier. These prepositions, and their unavoidable necessity in the context of discussing agency, reflect a spatial conception of personhood which models it as a function receiving inputs and returning outputs; a machine for being.

Following Gell, as well as several of the examples above of artists-as-mediums, a dominant shape attributed to a spatial concept of personhood has been that of the vessel, with its implied interiority. T. S. Eliot, in his impersonal theory of poetry, suggests that the creative reaction occurs 'inside' the poet's mind, just as Cezanne invites the landscape to think itself 'in' him. Furthermore, accepting the notion that the person must be 'sacrificed' (Eliot and Blanchot) in order to make way for exterior agencies implies that the person is a thing (vessel or otherwise) of finite capacity, and that these spiritual agents are made of some such material which, like matter, comes in discrete quantities which cannot occupy the same soul-space simultaneously.

As touched upon by Warner, the body as a vessel housing a homunculus is a famously dead-end model of personhood, now a classic example of the datedness of Cartesianism. Not only has some such thing never been found in an autopsy; more discouraging is that the homunculus produces the problem of infinite regress. Within this, the notion of creative processes taking place 'inside' a person have not only become theoretically unpopular, but also acquired a tone of arrogance, or over-glorification of the artist-individual as genius. But the inadequacy of this theory is no reason in itself to entirely discard a spatialised model of the person, or to write off our intuitions as illusory too prematurely. The hollow vessel might simply not be the right shape. Maybe personhood has another shape.

Souls and Waves

We have seen how there is a human urge to prescribe locations to agents and articulate their intentional vectors in grammar and in theories of authorship. In thinking about authorship as a position of mediation, the author's person is imagined to occupy a space in between some 'input' and 'output'. This intuitive topology of personhood seems to be rife with a certain compelling (but not necessarily reliable) assumption of a 'physics' of agency, complete with laws of motion, conservation of (spiritual) matter, and an exclusion principle (the intuition that two agents cannot occupy the same space simultaneously; that one or the other 'takes over'). In speculating on an alternative 'shape' for personhood then, it seems appropriate as a first step to consult a physical understanding of a medium - or rather, a forcefield.

In physics, a medium is characterised by the phenomenon it is amenable to facilitating. Therefore, an electromagnetic field facilitates electromagnetic waves, or light. Air is a field that facilitates sound, and water is a field that facilitates the kinds of waves which manifest, at various scales, as ripples or tsunamis. Without the medium, without the forcefield, there is no manifest effect - in a vacuum, sound is not heard, because there is no matter to disturb in a vacuum, and thus the event of sounding does not take place. This dependency is reminiscent of Cezanne's comment, in which the landscape requires him as a medium, to 'think itself'. And when I think about the phenomenon of waves, I experience a similar bafflement to that of the mask carver: in one sense the wave is entirely dependent on its forcefield, which is the matter of its being; on the other, the wave seems entirely individuated from it - we do not call air 'sound', even though air is the thing that 'sounds'. The distinction between wave and field is intuitive and serviceable to theories of physics, yet it is a distinction directly analogous to 'mind and body' dualism. Like a 'soul', a wave has ghostly properties - it 'appears' as an apparition.

Phenomena like light, sound and the waves crashing against a coastline are literally characterised by their pattern. What we know as the colour 'blue' waves the electromagnetic field with comparably greater levels of energy than 'red'; its energetic blueprint is experienced by us as a unique colour and luminosity. This travelling pattern of energy is in physics conceived as a disturbance within the field, that then ripples in a

persisting domino effect throughout the medium. This persisting pattern is what gives a phenomenon like a wave coming towards the shore the minimal requirements of a personality: a pattern that repeats and persists in such a way that it can become familiar and recognised. Perhaps the 'shape' of agency is not a vessel, but a thickness of matter amenable to being waved by a distinct frequency that we recognise as character.

What are the qualities of a good medium? Following Cezanne's iterative brushstrokes, a good medium must be made of some uniform cellular volume, like the atoms of sounding air. To wave, a medium must be waveable. In T.S. Eliot's terms, a good medium makes no personal impositions, which are only noise to the self-othering the poet seeks. You have to lie still, like a guitar string, to then become animated with character. With Cindy Sherman, whose authorship is enacted in the material of documenting her own estranged body, we saw more starkly how her mode of authorship, as a medium for various fictional characters, affects also the flavour of her personhood. As with the spiritual medium, she is possessed [by 'others'], and moreover her entire identity, for us her audience, seems characterised by her anonymous ubiquity. With T.S. Eliot we might then wonder whether subscribing to this view of authorship-as-mediation in turn incorporates a broader notion that a *person* is a medium, whose essence, if we had to ascribe it something such, would be an essence of potential; a *fiction* of being someone which never fulfills itself but only dreams up the character which it hurries to impersonate. Furthermore, with Cezanne we speculated whether he donates his consciousness to the landscape in order to gift it self-possession, the ability to have itself.

Looking at myself in the mirror, as in the aforementioned experiment (an experiment which many bored souls have accidentally subjected themselves to), I behold myself at first but gradually lose myself to a mask. One would have thought that a mirror would help me have myself, but in fact it makes me see myself in my literality as an everyperson, a 'prop for becoming', a self-fictioner. It is interesting that this deep form of looking at oneself leads to a feeling of self-estrangement, as if under that close gaze the person is lost. Perhaps a certain amount of distance from oneself is required, in order for one to have oneself, to be self-possessed, to be a person.

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