

17. The Critical Voice

– But this flagrant beating of the drum for yourself is irksome and tiresome. It's like a continual circling around a subject of second-rate importance. Long before you reached this point of your autobiographical essay, the question of where you stood or, for that matter, stand in relation to such and such a thinker, theory, or line of thought stood open and in need of response. It can't go very well for the subject of truth-telling if all but the voice of one truth-teller is heard and countless others are relegated to a mute background.

Whose voice is this that is both mine and not mine? That is both sympathetic enough to attach me to it and unsympathetic enough to seem like the enemy? No doubt it is part and parcel of a common enough practise, seen very much amongst scholars, of imagining others raising objections to their work in order to, in quasi-dialogue fashion, take on all comers and come out the victor. Indeed, I can't fail to be part of their company insofar as I share a sufficient number of their values not to want to be ignored by them.

It would do well perhaps to let this inner critic, this consciousness of being able to be criticized from all sides, show his horns and get his oar in on occasion. Such a move would be close to capturing all aspects of the truth-teller whereas the latter as pure monologue is already operating with the presumption that the truth can be told separate from the teller. In truth, I don't think that I myself can dispense with this presumption but only keep pointing to it. Such an equivocal or shuttling-back-and-forth manoeuvre of course flies in the face of so much that goes down as truth-telling and, for this reason, it will be a constant effort to let the critic have his say.

– Despite various feints to bring in other voices, you always resume the monologue of knowing the truth.

I certainly want to do more than feint other voices. I want to properly register them. But nothing can be done outside the so-called monologue of knowing the truth about my subject insofar as it is my monologue and my moment to hold court. All I can do is make it as open as possible on the basis of believing that it has never been quite open before. It has never been the case before that one could see clear through the thinker to his subject and then back again. In such an elevated state of transparency, whatever systemacity there may be must flow from – must in fact be one with – the multiplicity that is the subject as truth-teller in relation to the other, the subject as truth-telling.

