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mentor's introduction

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There comes a loud knocking at the door and a voice utters, "Who goes there?" This fragment from Shakespeare is, I suggest, writ large in symbolic expansion even as it is printed small in words-of-text. For poised in the center of this spec of dialogue there is staged a door - a door most heavily closed. On one side a voice initiates the exchange, not with words but with the body. And therein lies a mystery. There is a loud utterance that reveals no concrete voice and no concrete image, the absence of which is potentially ominous. The haptic may reverberate far and loud, it seems, especially in the absence of any other sensorial language pipeline, even if it lacks precision - perhaps precisely because it lacks precision. It is a message filled with empty spaces left for the other to elaborate, fulfill, work through. But in this case the message appears to be too open, too overwhelming for the other to pick up and carry forth, too ambiguous and incomplete to call for projection. No wonder the other asks for more - much, much more. To ask, "Who?" is to insert no small question. For if the one who knocked is to be a strange, how does such a one answer so complex a riddle? And how do they convince their other that what they offer and/or what the door conceals is not utter fabrication?

And to ask, "Who goes there?" is to further nail down the door as a two-sided/two headed obstacle - for the one on the outside comes and goes freely in the outside world, and dares to initiate the dialogue, all the while daring to use the door to remain incognito. But the other, who faces the other side of the door, the inner side, is caught in an inner space in a state of limbo. This inside other subject cannot initiate (This role has already been claimed.); this other cannot easily escape, and although protected by the door is also trapped by it. This other cannot dialogue openly without potentially great risk until they know what danger (or delight) lies hidden in the knocks that so loudly hammered a secret onto the door.

And what of our position in the audience? We too are entangled inside this drama, inside the dilemma that inhabits the two-faces of the door - inside a drama that is itself so fully unfilled. Suppose, for a moment that it is a film we are watching. And that we are always on the other side of the door; i.e., opposite to both utterances as they are performed - inside as the knocking comes and outside as the voice cries out, "Who goes there?". In this short shot/reverse shot scenario, we are in each case only able to read as

much as each of the actors, for our view is their view - always framed by the door's determination to offer us an overloaded dose of absence. (On a theatrical stage this presentation is not possible because in the absence of being able to manoeuvre the entire audience to view first one side of the door and then the other, as the movie camera proposes, it would fall upon the director to flip the door from one side to the other; while this could add new content, it would also undermine the door's professed solidity as an obstacle creating tension between two voices - for us in the audience.)

If, as film-makers we decide to insert another level of absence, we could situate the responding voice (Who goes there?) mid-way between the upper and lower register where the male tenor and the female alto overlap, thereby leaving the audience to project on to it their preferred gender identity. In any case, or so it seems, in order to sustain our relations with others, we are wont to ask, "Who speaks?" (Who goes there?), not just calling for labels such as gender, age, size, name, but rather for an answer that has sufficient complexity to constitute for us a speaking subject that is fully-dimensional. We are in search of an answer that penetrates, at least in some measure, the multitude of layers in the doors that stand between and among us.[1]

Cooley's research project, as delineated, potentially embraces this complexity. In eliciting her subjects to come knocking at her door, she can ask, "Who goes there?", and she can use her own experience (in response to the same question addressed to herself) as a basis to evolve her inner construction of their answers. This interviewee/interviewer, knocker/responder, speaker/spoken dynamic is a framework that can encompass a fulfilling range of voices on both sides of the door. And then Cooley, at a further remove (off stage), is ideally situated to respond to it a la audience/researcher to encompass yet another layering of voice, this time between the two sides of the texts.

Footnote

1. The above is an excerpt from "The Emperor's Nude Clothes" (Horner) (in preparation), Journal, 49: 6052-5.

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