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Untying the tongue

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Abstract

what prompted me to write open is broken was the realization that the English language tongue-ties me. this 'restricted mobility' was most apparent in my attempts to speak of my erotic life, such speechlessness is not peculiar to me. few erotic texts exist in north american women's writing, is it taboo? TABOO: 'ta, mark + bu, exceedingly.' are women afraid to 'mark' the paper? or as Hélène Cixous writes, 'inscribe' ourselves? it is difficult, women already feel (are) far too vulnerable in this society. 'To write: I am a woman is heavy with consequences.' (Nicole Brossard, *These Our Mothers*)

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what prompted me to write *open is broken* was the realization that the English language tongue-ties me. this 'restricted mobility' was most apparent in my attempts to speak of my erotic life. such speechlessness is not peculiar to me. few erotic texts exist in north american women's writing. is it taboo? TABOO: 'ta, mark + bu, exceedingly.' are women afraid to 'mark' the paper? or as Hélène Cixous writes, 'inscribe' ourselves? it is difficult. women already feel (are) far too vulnerable in this society. 'To write: I am a woman is heavy with consequences.'

(Nicole Brossard, *These Our Mothers*)

'Patriarchal development of consciousness has an indisputable inner need to «murder the mother», that is, as far as possible to negate, exclude, devalue, and repress the «maternal-feminine» world which represents the unconscious.'

(Erich Neumann, 'Narcissism, Normal Self-Formation and the Primary Relation to the Mother')

immediately surfaces the second intimidation: fear of narcissism. though few mirrors stand in which we can see our eroticism reflected, we are terrorized by the thought of this accusation. safer to have no 'marks'. no marks? pornography is ignorance. and romance? we have been persuaded to believe eroticism is romance. ROMANCE: 'made in Rome.' so much for romance! the world itself connotes fabricating an image *outside* ourselves compared to discovery of the erotic wellspring *within*.

‘Where the god is male and father only, and ... is associated with law, order, civilization, *logos* and super-ego, religion — and the pattern of life which it encourages — tends to become a matter of these only, to the neglect of nature, instinct ... feeling, *eros*, and what Freud called the «id». Such a religion, so far from «binding together» and integrating, may all too easily become an instrument of repression, and so of individual and social disintegration.’

(Victor White, *Soul and Psyche: An Enquiry Into the Relationship of Psychotherapy and Religion*)

the language itself does not reflect women’s sensual experience. for most of us, however, it is our native tongue, the only language we have, *open is broken* is about the words i abandoned. ABANDON: ‘(to put) in one’s power; a, to, at, from Latin ad, to + bandon, power.’ so, when we abandon words, it isn’t a simple matter of leaving them behind but rather a turning over of our power *to* those who keep them: speechlessness the consequence.

the word is the act. when i abandon a word i relinquish the experience it calls up. yet, how can i use the word ‘intercourse’ as a lesbian? and what do i say as a feminist, when in my deepest erotic moments words like ‘surrender’ pulse in my head? a dictionary defines surrender as: ‘to relinquish possession or control of to another because of demand or compulsion.’ still, my body insisted, my instincts persisted/pulled me toward this word. it seemed full of life, and indeed, in IX, i find it is. the truth is in the roots.

contemporary *usage* of our words is what tongue-tied me. the repressed is the absent. women have been DISMEMBERED: ‘dis-, (removal) + membrum, member’ from the word. in tracing words back, i have found that etymology nearly always re-members the feminine sensibility of our inner landscapes.

usage is selective. Cixous writes: 'I maintain unequivocally that there is such a thing as *marked* writing; that, until now, far more extensively and repressively than is ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural — hence political, typically masculine — economy; that this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated ... that this locus has grossly exaggerated all signs of sexual opposition (and not sexual difference), where woman has never her *turn* to speak.' ('Laugh of the Medusa')

Mary Daly describes the dominance of male culture as the 'presence of absence'. this presence of absence in our language has resulted in the abandonment of our most significant words. tongue-tied. no marks. no rituals. RITUAL: 'rite.' RITE: 'retornāre, to return.' RETURN: 'turn, threshold, thread.' the thread knotted around our tongues — untied, spirals us to the edge. MARK: 'merg-, boundary, border, marking out the boundary by walking around it (ceremonially «beating the bounds»).'.

mark of the spirit. painted bodies. marked objects. sacred openings. threshold to altered states. TABOO: 'exceedingly marked, marked as sacred.' invisible made visible.

abandoned words spring up from deep places. claiming our eroticism reclaims the dismembered.

'homesickness without memory
yet tongues are not fooled
tissue «clairvoyant»
memorizes, re-members «chiaroscuro» history'

(XI)

RITUAL

RITE

RETURN

MARK

TABOO

Audrey Lourde, in her essay 'Uses of the Erotic: the Erotic as Power', names the erotic 'the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge'. tracing the etymology of abandoned words has that same reconstructive power. reclaims what we subconsciously know, passionately BELIEVE: 'leubh-, livelong, love, libido.'

intact. the texts woven in/are the very fibers of our tissue. TISSUE: 'teks-, text.' the body of language whole again.

Daphne Marlatt, in her poetic statement 'musing with mothertongue', characterizes this phenomenon: 'inhabitant of language, not master, not even mistress, this new woman writer ... in having is had, is held by it, what she is given to say. in giving it away is given herself, on that double edge where she has always lived, between the already spoken and the unspeakable, sense and non-sense. only now she writes it, risking non-sense, chaotic language leafings, unspeakable breaches of usage, intuitive leaps. inside language she leaps for joy, shoving out the walls of taboo and propriety, kicking syntax, discovering life in old roots.'

writing comes out of chaos much as Eros was born out of Chaos. in trusting the relationship between eroticism/etymology and tissue/text, the language — my language — broke open. my tongue freed. to mark exceedingly.